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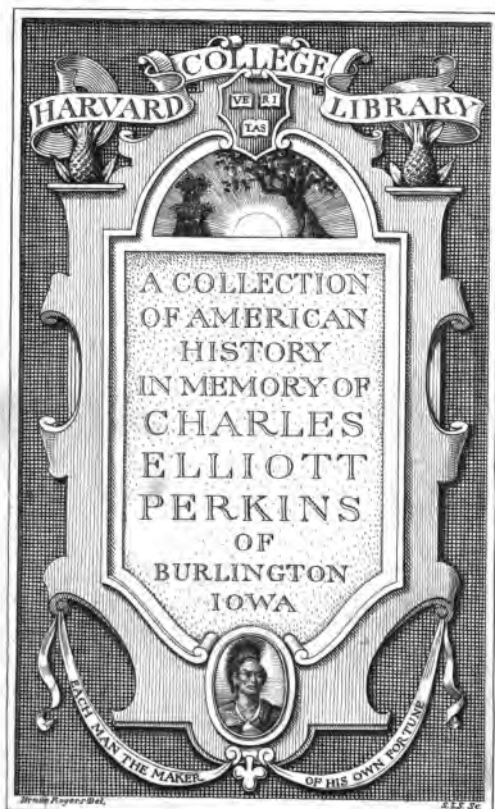
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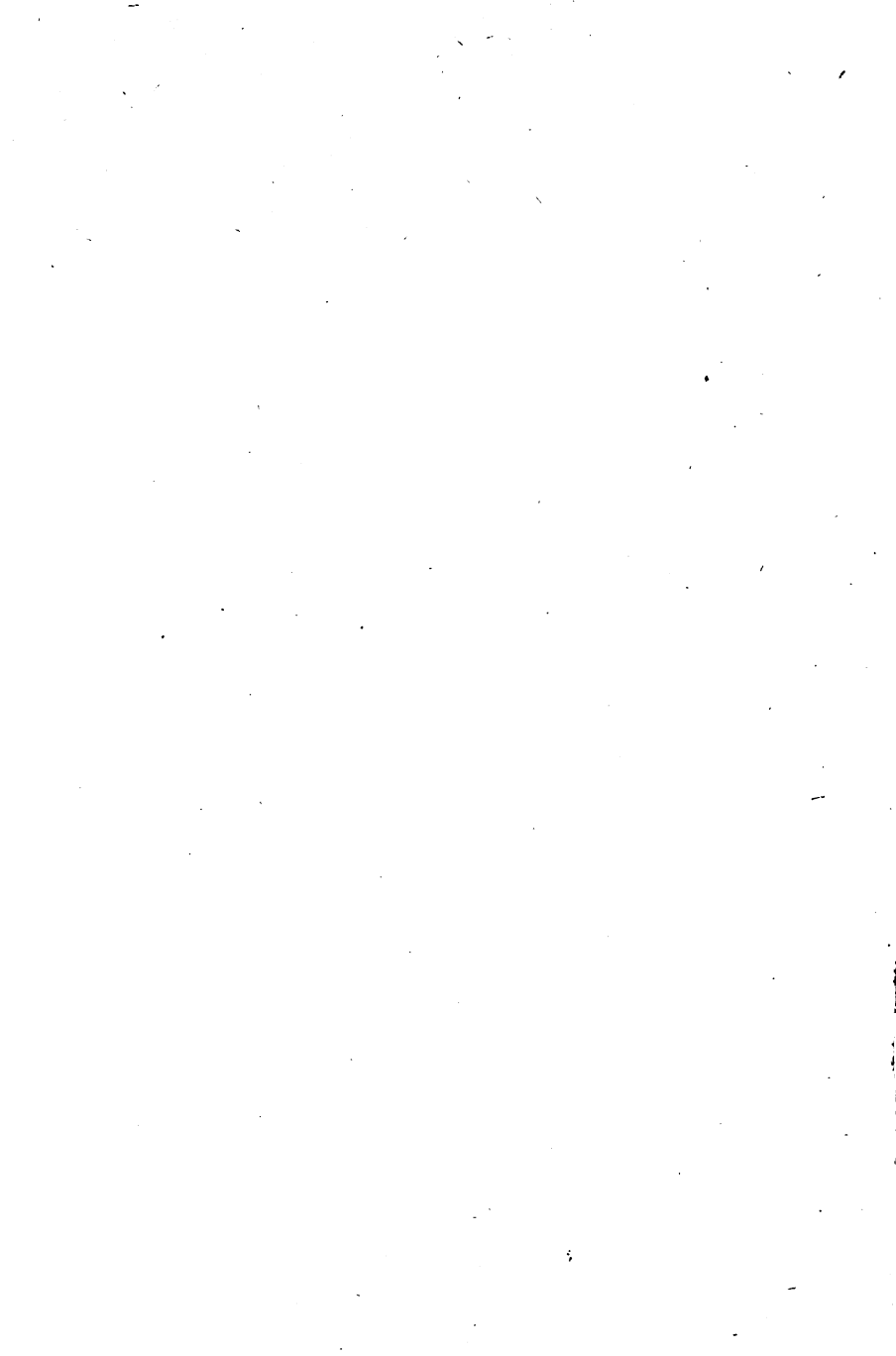
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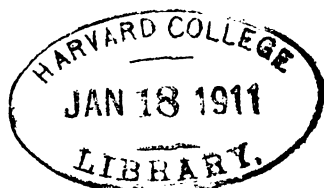
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P R E F A C E.

PERHAPS the true animus of this story cannot be better explained than in the musings of John Ridd, hero of the famous romance, "Lorna Doone," during his first visit to London, some two hundred years ago—at any rate, as far as the land is concerned—as follows: "Now, while I was walking daily in and out great crowds of men (few of whom had any freedom from the cares of money, and many of whom were even morbid with a worse pest, called 'politics'), I could not quit of thinking how we jostle one another. God has made the earth quite large, with a spread of land enough for all to live on without fighting. Also a mighty spread of water, laying hands on sand and cliff with a solemn voice in storm time; and in the gentle weather moving men to thoughts of equity. This, as well, is full of food; being two thirds of the world, and reserve for devouring knowledge, by the time the sons of men have fed away the dry land. Yet before the land itself has acknowledged touch of man upon one in a hundred acres, and before one mile in ten thousand of the exhaustless ocean has ever felt the plunge of

hook, or combing of the haul-nets, lo, we crawl in flocks together upon the hot ground that stings us, even as the black grubs crowd upon the harried nettle! Surely we are too much given to follow the tracks of each other."

If this just criticism of the overcrowding of a favored city were true, so long ago, how much more is it true of the densely populated cities and larger towns of our day, both in the Old World and the New?

This story is largely a story of fact, and the writer hopes that it will show that educated, refined, and religious people may overcome the dangers and difficulties of frontier life; serve God, help themselves, and their fellow-men, as well as those who have had fewer advantages.

Since the writer is a resident of Dakota, the descriptions of the country and all that pertains to it may be considered reliable.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

The troublesome statement—Office tyranny—P. & Q. R. R. Co.'s office—Clerks—Harry Noble's submission—Harry Noble—Peter BigmanPage 9

CHAPTER II.

Harry Noble's home in Jersey City—James Noble—Mrs. Noble—Minnie Noble—Grace Constant—Nathan Constant—The sealed letter and dying request—A pleasant evening after disappointment 18

CHAPTER III.

The sociable—Peter Bigman and Grace Constant—At the Academy of Design—Peter Bigman's proposal and rejection..... 28

CHAPTER IV.

Harry Noble's ill health—Dakota pamphlet—Dakota letter—Harry Noble resigns—Mrs. Noble's opinion of clerkships—Peter Bigman's second rejection—Harry Noble bids farewell to the office..... 40

CHAPTER V.

Journeying to Dakota—Mitchell—Dakota hotels—Plankinton—Journey to Land View—An ex-clerk of A. T. Stewart & Co. driver—Land View—hotel accommodations..... 62

CHAPTER VI.

A March day in a Dakota hotel—Hunting land—The young land agent—The whole family go land hunting—Riding over the prairie—Eureka—An estate of nearly one thousand acres—The beautiful lake.....Page 94

CHAPTER VII.

Preempting land and taking up tree claims—Building houses—Nobleton—Buying a team—Erecting the family altar—Attending church—Journey to Yankton, United States Land-office—Oak Hollow ranch—Wash Huntbiz—Scotland—Yankton—The United States Land-office..... 109

CHAPTER VIII.

Learning to plow—Miss Fanny Foundit, the preemptor—Mrs. Snow and her four children hunting land—The Snow children visit the Noble family—Minnie's and Grace's experiences as nurses—The mysterious letter lost and found..... 155

CHAPTER IX.

The pleasant spring-time—Peter Bigman's arrival at Nobleton—Locates a cattle ranch near Nobleton—Perjury and profanity in Dakota—Peter Bigman's sickness—Recovery—Pat Brislin... 189

CHAPTER X.

Fourth of July on the frontier—Patriotism, races, etc.—Peter Dick jumps Harry Noble's claim—Harry Noble elected delegate to the Constitutional Convention—Peter Bigman induces Peter Dick to leave Harry Noble's claim—Peter Bigman increasing in favor at Nobleton..... 207

CONTENTS.

7

CHAPTER XI.

Neighbors: Hon. Joshua Lamberton, Richard Moneycounter, Rev. John Landhunter—Sioux Indian merchants.....Page 232

CHAPTER XII.

Going to the Constitutional Convention—Jacob Shark—A drive around Sioux Falls—Brookings' Island—The falls—Sioux quartzite—The Constitutional Convention—Harry's speech—Jack Lucky, the old settler..... 251

CHAPTER XIII.

Return to Nobleton after the convention—A pleasant surprise—Mrs. Noble's loss—Proving up preemption claims—Richard Moneycounter's offer and refusal... 295

CHAPTER XIV.

Indian summer—A conversation—The prairie on fire—Nobleton in ruins—A home with the Snows—A new Nobleton—Proposals renewed..... 309

CHAPTER XV.

A week of suspense—Richard Moneycounter's offer—More losses and troubles—Mrs. Noble's illness—A talk by the way..... 327

CHAPTER XVI.

Minnie's illness—Peter Bigman's opportunity—The proposal—A fortnight's delay—Mrs. Noble and Grace..... 338

CHAPTER XVII.

Fanny Foundit's long visit—The blizzard—Harry sprains his ankle—Grace Constant's night meditation—She declines to accept Peter Bigman—A beautiful morning after a storm 353

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mrs. Noble gives Grace Constant her father's letter on her twenty-first birthday—Peter Bigman's unexpected journey to PlankintonPage 374

CHAPTER XIX.

Return to New York—Handsome gifts—Nathan Constant's last letter to his daughter—Harry's scruples overcome..... 403

CHAPTER XX.

Harry relates his Dakota experiences to the clerks and gives them advice about going West—Improvements planned for Nobleton—Peter Bigman's marriage—A double wedding—Return to Nobleton 421

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CHAPTER I.

The troublesome statement—Office tyranny—P. & Q. R. R. Co.'s office — Clerks — Harry Noble's submission — Harry Noble — Peter Bigman.

“**M**R. BIGMAN wishes to see you, Mr. Noble.”
“I will take this statement to him in a moment.” Harry Noble bent over the difficult statement with a perplexed but determined look on his face.

“Mr. Bigman desires you to report at his desk immediately with that statement.” It was the office boy again.

“Tell him I'll be there with it in five minutes,” Harry Noble replied, looking still more anxious and perplexed, and rapidly putting more figures down upon a large square piece of paper, ruled by blue lines into small squares.

In less than five minutes he left his desk and walked slowly down the long room, with his head down, examining the paper as he walked to the desk of the head clerk. He held out the statement slowly, and it seemed reluctantly, to him. Mr. Bigman

reached out for it quickly and impatiently, scanned it closely for a few moments, with a scowl on his face; then handed it back with a sneer, saying,

"This statement is all wrong, Mr. Noble."

"I beg your pardon, sir; but I followed your directions as nearly as I could," Harry Noble replied, flushing.

"Impossible! I never told you to make out a statement like that."

"I did the best I could, sir," Harry replied, straightening up, and his eyes beginning to flash; "the directions were not very clear, and—"

"The directions were not clear, eh!" exclaimed Mr. Bigman, getting very red in the face, seizing a small ruler, and beginning to slap the green-covered desk impatiently with it. He was very angry, for he greatly prided himself upon giving clear directions about work which he ordered done.

"No, sir; they were not clear to me, so I consulted one of the older clerks, and I made out the statement according to your directions, as we understood them."

"Asked one of the other clerks! Why did you not ask me?" He slapped the green cloth until the dust flew.

"You had stepped out of the room, and as you said you were in a hurry for the statement, I thought you would not object to my consulting a clerk who is more familiar with these statements than I am."

Mr. Bigman gave a grunt, and muttered something like a suppressed oath. Suddenly straightening himself up he said, in a kind of low growl, "Go and bring me those directions, and I will see if I can get them through your thick head."

"Sir!" exclaimed Harry; his fingers twitched convulsively, and he set his teeth firmly together; the eyes of the two men met; and it was evident in that glance that Peter Bigman hated Harry and was using his petty authority to insult him. You could see, too, that Harry Noble disliked Peter Bigman, and that nothing would have done him more good than to have picked up his puny form in his stalwart arms and dropped him out of one of the fine windows of the handsome brown stone building upon the pavement below. Harry eyed his antagonist a moment, then his discretion got the better of his feelings, as the thought of the loved ones at home dependent upon him arose in his mind. He turned upon his heel, went to his desk, returned with the written directions, and listened with enforced patience while his superior officer gave him instructions differing materially from them. In conclusion Peter Bigman said, with great assumed dignity: "Mr. Noble, you will work at this statement until it is complete; I promised to send it on the next train." (That was a lie.)

"But I cannot finish it until seven o'clock this evening."

"I can't help it, the statement must go on the next train."

"But I promised to take mother and the girls to a sociable this evening, and I cannot go if I am required to finish this statement."

"Business before pleasure; it must go on the next train."

Peter Bigman inwardly gloated at being able to disappoint Harry Noble.

Harry knew that the business did not require the statement to go on the next train, and that Peter Bigman was only venting his petty spite on him. He lost all control of himself and exclaimed, excitedly: "I won't finish it; I'll work until office hours are over, then I'll go home."

"Very well, sir!" replied Mr. Bigman, coldly. "If the statement is not finished to-night, you must take the consequences."

It was in the freight department of the great P. & Q. R. R. Co., in their grand brown stone building on one of the down-town street in the great city of New York; likely to be the great financial center of the world. The freight department occupied a noble room, high and wide, light and airy; it was beautifully frescoed. At the end of the room, facing the entrance, was the black walnut desk of the head clerk, behind which he sat exercising a willful and unpopular authority. Upon the desk were two large, square, massive, cut-glass inkstands, one for

black and the other for red ink ; a mucilage bottle ; a pen-rack, and a sponge pen-wiper. Many papers were strewn over it in confusion, some large, some small ; some very long, others very short ; some with many ruled lines in red and blue ink on them, others with a line or two of writing on them, and a great deal of blank paper ; forms of the company, which the officers did not consider it a willful waste to send out daily with but so little writing on. Yet managers of great corporations, generally, claim to be great economists. Down each side of the room was ranged a row of double high desks, allowing a clerk to work on each side, facing each other. A high stool was provided for each clerk, but generally, they preferred to stand while working. Some of the clerks were gray-headed men, some middle aged, and others in the bloom of youth. Judging from their coats they seemed to be a poverty-stricken set indeed ; for a sorrier collection of old-fashioned, glossy, dirty, ink-spotted coats could scarcely be found on any set of men outside of an office. That oldish man, near the window, wears a black, long-tailed, old-fashioned frock coat, glossy with usage. This young snob, with his hair parted in the middle, dainty, curled, and perfumed mustache, red necktie, with crescent gold pin, set with rubies and sapphires, wears a black and white striped calico coat, too small and too short for him ; too short in the sleeves, creased, wrinkled, torn, the front and sleeves badly marked with ink spots,

for he uses it as a pen-wiper. But these are only their office coats. If you were to meet these same clerks on Broadway after office hours they would be decently, and some of them quite elegantly, dressed.

Harry Noble returned to his desk and began to make out a new report in a great passion. But after awhile he began to cool. He thought of the loved ones at home; of the great inconvenience and perhaps suffering to which they would be put if he lost his place. At length he decided, with a great gulp in his throat, to swallow his righteous wrath at the petty tyranny of Peter Bigman, and to finish the statement that night. Then he went to the desk of a clerk who passed the house where he lived on his way home, and told him to tell his mother that he could not go to the sociable because he was detained in the office by business.

"Blamed shame!" said the clerk in a whisper; "I'll bet its some more of Peter Bigman's confounded meanness. 'Put a beggar on horseback.'"

When the hands on the big round clock at the end of the room, over the head clerk's desk, pointed to five o'clock, the clerks put the books, big and little, into the great vault on the side of the room, put the statements, reports, and papers they were working at into their desks, went to the long row of hooks at the end of the room, took down their coats and hats, hung up their office coats, and singly and in groups left the room; all but the head clerk and Harry

Noble. Harry was working hard at the statement, and the head clerk was apparently busily writing at his desk, but a few minutes after the other clerks had gone he quit writing and walked toward the door; as he reached Harry's desk, Harry, without looking up, said: "I will finish the statement, sir."

"Very well, sir; when it is finished put it in an envelope, direct it to its destination, and put it in the R. R. S. box, so that it will go out on the next train."

With these parting directions, and a look of low triumph in his eye, he left Harry alone, hot, indignant, disappointed.

Harry Noble was a fine young fellow, six feet two inches high in his boots. He was straight and thin, but lithe, quick, and graceful in all his movements; light brown hair, tawny Dundreary whiskers and mustache; eyes—blue, clear, and candid; when in a merry mood, laughing eyes; when angry, quick and flashing; Roman nose, pleasant mouth, and handsome big, white teeth. Harry's habits and morals were good, for he had good home-training and he was a member of the Church. A noble, manly, independent fellow was Harry; rather hasty sometimes and impulsive, but good hearted and generous; apt to speak an angry word, give an angry look, or even do an angry deed, but equally quick was he to forgive injuries done him, imputing the same generous motives to the heart of the offender which existed in his own. He was a friendly fellow and consequently had

many friends. He loved justice and hated lying, sycophancy, and underhand work of all kinds.

Peter Bigman had sprung from very humble parents, but he was ambitious, and had a strong will; he had worked himself up from the place of office boy to his present position, which had always been the goal of his ambition. By close attention to his work and his long connection with the office he had mastered the routine of the business, and made himself necessary to his superiors. Combined with his industry was his sycophancy, for although he was a member of the Church, yet he would stoop to do any work, no matter how mean, crooked, or dishonest; not exactly dishonest in the eyes of the law, for officials of corporations avoid that; but some of them are adepts at tip-toeing the line which divides honesty and honor from dishonesty and dishonor. So when his superiors found him an industrious tool, they used him, and when the proper time came he demanded his price—which was promotion. He received it, for although a man generally despises his tool, yet policy demands the price of service. Outwardly, to the world and to the Church, he was a man of good habits and good morals, and he was known to have some good qualities, for he was good to his father and mother. But he was considered conceited and egotistical, and had not many real friends outside of his own family. He was a man of medium height; thin black hair and black eyes, black side whiskers, small nose, large

mouth and small chin; there was generally a scowl on his face, but when interest and inclination required it, he could be very pleasant. He had a cold and clammy hand. He was arbitrary and exacting with his subordinates; never praised them, and never displayed his displeasure by open words, but by dark looks, scowls, and occasionally by innuendo; he might be expected to attack from the rear, but never in front.

CHAPTER II.

Harry Noble's home in Jersey City—James Noble—Mrs. Noble—Minnie Noble—Grace Constant—Nathan Constant—The sealed letter and dying request—A pleasant evening after disappointment.

IT was eight o'clock that evening when Harry Noble crossed the Pennsylvania Railroad ferry to his home in Jersey City. It was nearly nine o'clock when he reached home.

Mrs. Noble rented part of a three-story brick house in the suburbs of the city; one of the houses in one of those long blocks so frequent in Jersey City.

He opened the door with his dead latch-key, and walked up stairs to the cheaply but tastily and comfortably furnished sitting-room. There were three ladies in the room, reading and sewing—his mother, sister Minnie, and Mrs. Noble's ward, Grace Constant. The mother looked anxious, the young ladies looked vexed.

"I am sorry, Harry dear, that your work detained you so late at the office," said his mother, in a low, sympathetic voice.

"Some of that hateful Peter Bigman's doings, I have no doubt," said Minnie, plying her needle with extreme rapidity.

"You may be sure of that," said Harry, languidly, sitting down.

"Don't sit down, Harry," said Grace Constant, rising; "we have kept your tea waiting for you, come out into the dining-room, poor, tired boy!"

Harry arose and went out of the room with her.

Grace and Harry had been raised together, and treated each other with brotherly and sisterly familiarity.

"Do you notice how thin and dispirited Harry is getting of late?" said Mrs. Noble, after they had left the room.

"Yes, mother," Minnie replied; "what can be the matter with him?"

"I am afraid that the confinement of the office and the petty persecutions of Peter Bigman are injuring his health," said his mother, sorrowfully.

"It does seem as though a great tall, strong, manly fellow like Harry ought to have some different work to do than sitting on a high stool at a desk and writing and figuring all day. He seems awfully out of place, to me," said Minnie, quickly and indignantly.

"To me, too; but the poor boy can get nothing else to do; he has tried and tried. He never complains, but I can see that his mental sufferings are great. I wish I could help him, but women seem so helpless sometimes; but I am thinking and studying all the time to try and get him into something more

congenial, both to his mind and body ; if James, my dear husband, were living, it would be different."

James Noble had been a prosperous merchant in the China trade, respected, loved, and honored by all who knew him in business, society, and Church. His family had lived elegantly, even luxuriously, for he was very rich, and loved to give them every comfort and luxury that money could purchase, being satisfied in his mind that his wife would not allow luxury to run into prodigality in his family.

A fellow-merchant, and old friend, becoming involved in his business, persuaded James Noble to indorse his notes for a large sum, thinking that if he could thus tide over a certain period of time, that certain enterprises of his would turn out profitably ; but a panic occurring soon afterward, his friend failed, and James Noble was obliged to pay the notes ; this, together with large losses in his own business, soon drove him into bankruptcy, and his family from a luxurious home to a very modest one. But the hardest blow came afterward, for before his estate was fully settled up he had a stroke of apoplexy, which carried him quickly to his long home.

A friend had procured Harry a situation in the railroad company's office at sixty dollars per month ; this, with a small annuity received by the ward, quarterly, and a little that they could earn by fancy needlework, constituted the income of the family. Her husband's creditors had kindly given her a few hun-

dred dollars from the wreck of his estate ; this money Mrs. Noble had prudently put aside for any unexpected emergency which might arise. Margaret Noble was a born lady—lady-like in her feelings and actions. She was well educated and accomplished. She was about medium height, of well rounded figure, rather slow in her movements, but exceedingly graceful. Her hair was black, wavy, and slightly sprinkled with gray ; she wore it brushed down on her forehead and on the sides of her face, and drawn back and rolled up in a great coil on the back of her head, like Mrs. Rutherford B. Hayes in her pictures. She sometimes wore dainty little lace caps, trimmed with just a shadow of light pink or lavender ribbon, which were very becoming. Her eyes were hazel, with a soft, genial, thoughtful look ; her nose aquiline ; there was always the suspicion of a smile about her pleasant mouth ; her teeth were good, her chin perfect, her complexion a clear olive. She had great self-poise, that wonderful equanimity which is seldom seen, which is the result of naturally lady-like feelings, a cultured mind, subdued passions, and a strong will, and which cannot be successfully imitated or assumed. She always seemed the same thoughtful, genial, kind-hearted, sensible lady, mother, and warm friend. Her children loved her dearly, and she had hosts of admiring and loving friends.

Minnie Noble was her mother's daughter, almost an exact counterpart of her mother, excepting that

she had a very lively temperament, and was quick to retort; but for a young lady of twenty-one she had a remarkably well-balanced mind, at the same time she was fond of fun and amusements. She was exceedingly popular with her young companions. She had dark brown hair, hazel eyes, nose a trifle short and a little turned up, sweet red lips, a pretty chin, beautiful pearly white teeth, a clear and rather dark complexion.

Grace Constant was a rather stately young lady, a trifle tall, figure well rounded and graceful, light brown hair, large dark blue, liquid eyes—gentle eyes, until aroused, then firm and decided, as though they were the windows of a firm mind, backed by a strong will—rather large but well-shaped nose; mouth a trifle large, but with beautifully curved red lips; beautiful, strong, white teeth; chin of good size, and pretty ears; her complexion was a creamy white, tinted with an evanescent pink, beneath which could be seen the sapphire veins. She was very agreeable and amiable, but there was withal a natural dignity about her which made her rather slow in making friends, but once made, she kept them, for they soon became acquainted with the nobility of her character and the sweetness of her disposition, esteemed her highly and loved her deeply.

When Grace was about nine years old James Noble had received an urgent message from her father, Nathan Constant, requesting him to call upon him at his earliest convenience. Mr. Constant was an

esteemed friend of Mr. Noble's, and he made haste to comply with his request ; arrived at his house he was shocked to find him in very ill health.

"I was not aware you were so sick !" he exclaimed.

Mr. Constant was sitting in an easy chair, dressed in wrapper and slippers. He replied, in a low voice, "I was taken rather suddenly, and the doctors say that I can't last many weeks."

Mr. Noble tried to cheer up his old friend, telling him that the doctors were often mistaken ; but it was of no use.

"I have sent for you, James," he said, bracing himself up and speaking in a louder and firmer voice, "to make a request of you which will probably be my last."

James Noble assured him that he would be glad to comply with his wishes to the fullest extent of his ability.

"I shall tax your friendship to the fullest extent, James," he said.

"Do so."

"My dear friend, you are aware that I am a widower, and have been so for the last three years. I have but one child, my darling Grace ! It is her welfare, after I am gone, that hangs heavily upon my heart. I have no near relative with whom I would willingly trust her future, and among my many friends, I know of none but you and your admirable wife in whose charge I care to leave her ; she is now

nine years old ; will you take her ? will you become her guardian ? ”

“ We will, she is a sweet child ; we will do our best for the welfare of your child. ”

“ You have taken a load off my mind and heart, ” said Mr. Constant, seizing his hand.

“ I will leave Grace an annuity of four hundred dollars per annum, which will be paid quarterly, ” continued Mr. Constant, “ until she is twenty-one ; when she arrives at that age, you will please give her this letter. ” He opened a small drawer in a secretary which was near him, and took therefrom a small white letter, sealed with red sealing-wax, and handed it to Mr. Noble. “ Should your wife survive you, please leave it in her care to be handed to Grace on her twenty-first birthday. ”

“ I will guard this sacredly, ” said Mr. Noble, as he received the letter and buttoned it up in his breast pocket.

“ James, you will please not tell Grace of the existence of this letter unless she is likely to marry. If she wishes to marry, tell her that it was the dying request of her father that she will not marry until she reads the letter on her twenty-first birthday. ”

“ Your message shall be delivered to her in due season. ”

“ You will narrate this much of this interview to your wife. ”

"I will."

"Now put your head close to me, for I wish to speak very low so that by no possibility can I be overheard, for I wish to tell you a very important secret."

Mr. Noble put his head close to the sick man, who whispered something in his ear.

"Is it possible!" cried Mr. Noble, starting up quite excited; "I never dreamed it."

"I will tell you more about it."

Mr. Noble put his head down again, and Mr. Constant talked quite a long time, Mr. Noble making surprised comments occasionally.

"You are not to tell this to your wife unless you should die before she does."

"Certainly not."

It transpired afterward that James Noble died suddenly of apoplexy, and could not tell his wife.

After this conversation was over Mr. Noble took his departure, trying once more, before he left, to rally the spirits of his friend. He and his wife called upon him frequently afterward, and received many expressions of gratitude from him for promising to take charge of Grace. In a few weeks he died.

When Harry and Grace returned from the dining-room Harry looked rested and more cheerful; he took the "Evening Telegram" out of his pocket and began to read aloud the evening news, while the ladies sewed.

"I wonder who will be at the sociable to-night," said Minnie, when he had ceased reading.

"O, all the girls and fellows of our set," said Harry, impatiently.

"It's too provoking that we could not go."

"Minnie dear," said Mrs. Noble, gently, but reprovingly, "why did you speak of the sociable again when we had almost forgotten it."

"Well, I only want to say one thing more about it, and then I will hold my peace, and that is, that I would just like to give Peter Bigman a piece of my mind."

"Suppose we have a little sociable of our own," said Mrs. Noble. "Grace dear, wont you sing something for us?"

"Shall be delighted," she said, smiling. "Harry, if this is to be a sociable, you should escort me to the piano."

"It will afford me the greatest pleasure," arising smilingly, offering her his arm, and escorting her to a small piano on the other side of the room.

"What shall I sing?"

"O, any thing," said Minnie.

"Wait a moment," said Harry, looking over the music; "there, sing that."

"Annie Laurie!" said Grace; "that's so old."

"None of the new pieces are as good as that," said Harry.

He leaned toward her while she sang. This young

man and this young woman had been raised together with the freedom and intimacy of brother and sister, but if it was only brotherly love now beaming from his handsome blue eyes, it was strong brotherly love indeed.

CHAPTER III.

The sociable—Peter Bigman and Grace Constant—At the Academy of Design—Peter Bigman's proposal and rejection.

A YOUNG man and a maiden, brought up in the same family from childhood, with all the freedom of brother and sister, must retain many of the same familiar ways toward each other when he becomes a man and she a woman, unless a stronger, acknowledged passion intervenes. Should one possess such a passion and not the other, and be able to conceal it, then the same familiarity may continue; but how hard to conceal it!

Harry had always loved Grace, but when he was younger he supposed it the same feeling which he felt toward his sister Minnie, if, indeed, boy-like, he thought of it at all; but when he became a man it dawned slowly upon his mind that there was a marked difference between a brotherly love and that other love which brings mates together. He discovered it when other young men began to pay attention to Grace; he was not willing in his heart that others should bask in her smiles and win her love; had he known that her heart was his, they might pay homage to her; but Grace still treated him with the same sisterly familiarity, and was amiable and friend-

ly to all her admirers. Had Harry been in a position to marry her, or had he the prospect of doing so in a reasonable time, he would have declared his love; but he made up his mind that he would never tell her until he could take her to a comfortable home.

The sociable to which Harry and all the family were going, but were prevented by Peter Bigman's perversity, was one of a series occurring every fortnight. At the time for the next one the fates were more propitious, and they were all in attendance. It happened that this sociable, was held at the house of a friend of Peter Bigman's, who had persuaded Peter to attend. Peter was not sociable, and did not enjoy occasions of the kind much; there was not opportunity enough for him to shine, and so egotistical was he that he never enjoyed himself much where he could not be a central figure, and have others bow to what he esteemed his superior merits. This vein of egotism was spread very evenly all through his career, and even his religion had a strong impress of it. He was truly religious at times; you could not doubt it at those times if you closely observed him, but the general character of his religious life bore the impress of ambitious egotism. His outward life was blameless, that is, as far as his brethren in the church knew; they were generally working people and could not be expected to know the inside workings of the office of a great railroad corporation; and then his father and mother were staid old members of the

church. Peter Bigman loved music, he had a good voice, and was fond of singing. At the sociable he subsided into a corner very quickly after being introduced to the happy and lively company of assembled friends, and was a burden on the mind of his host all the evening, in his effort to entertain him. Toward the close of the evening Grace Constant was invited to sing; she sang a Scotch song very sweetly; she was a good singer, as might be seen from the attention with which her song was listened to. Peter Bigman, who had been listless before, listened to her with rapt attention, and joined heartily in the applause with which the song was received. Some one asked for a popular duet.

"I cannot sing it alone," said Grace, turning over the music, and smiling.

"I happen to know it and will help you sing it," said Peter Bigman, arising and going to the piano, much to the surprise of his host, as well as relief.

Now Grace had never met Peter Bigman before, and did not like him because he treated Harry so badly, but she was constrained by common politeness to sing the duet with him; they rendered it very finely, and it was loudly applauded.

Peter then asked Grace to join him in singing a favorite duet of his, which request was seconded by the company, and she complied. After they were through singing he escorted her to a seat, and hovered about her all the evening, greatly to Harry's

indignation, whose bright blue eyes fairly blazed at times.

It was not until near the close of the evening that Peter Bigman discovered that Grace Constant was Mrs. Noble's ward, and then he attempted to make himself very gracious to that lady.

Minnie fairly boiled inwardly, as she listened to him.

At the close of the evening he asked permission of Mrs. Noble to call upon the family, which request politeness constrained Mrs. Noble to grant.

"The hateful thing!" said Minnie, when they reached home; "how dare he come and pretend to be so nice to us, when he treats Harry so horribly!"

"Why did you allow him to call here, auntie?" said Grace; she always called Mrs. Noble auntie.

"My dear," Mrs. Noble replied, "I thought it best to be civil with him on Harry's account."

"Well! he will not receive much civility from me," said Minnie, tossing her head, with red cheeks and flashing eyes.

"My dear," said Mrs. Noble, with a mildly dignified air and a reproving tone of voice, "I have ever made it my pleasure to treat all my guests with hospitality, be they high or low, rich or poor, friends or enemies, and I have failed in my efforts if I have not succeeded in teaching my children the same duty."

"But you are such a dear good mother?" said Minnie,

in a subdued tone, leaning over the back of her chair and kissing her; "certainly we will be civil to him if you say so, and hospitality demands it, but I feel more like treating him like I heard an Irish woman in the alley the other day threaten to treat her daughter's beau, whom she did not like. 'Och! ye durty baste, if I iver catch yez in me house comin till see me Biddy agin, I'll toss a bucket of hot water down the back of yez!'"

They all laughed at this speech, and Minnie's imitation of the Irish woman's wrath, and good nature was restored.

"I must remind you, my dears, that kindness to one who is not friendly to us is not only hospitality, for even the Arabs do that, but it is one of the highest types of Christianity: 'If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.' It is one of the hardest things to learn in the Christian economy, but a Christian does learn it."

Mrs. Noble taught her children so lovingly and tenderly that they loved to listen to her.

When Peter Bigman called he was pleasantly received and sociably entertained by the whole family, but although he was civil to the other members of the family, he devoted most of his time to Grace, and kept her at the piano during the greater part of his call. Harry's hospitality and Christianity were tested to the utmost, but he succeeded in maintaining control of his feelings.

"I hope he wont repeat the dose soon," said Harry, after he had gone, "I couldn't stand it very often."

But he did call again soon, and, as before, monopolized Grace at the piano the greater part of the time.

"How long is this to last, mother?" asked Harry, after he had gone the second time; "is Bigman to be allowed to come here as often as he pleases and monopolize Grace?"

"Perhaps Grace likes to be monopolized," looking toward Grace, smilingly.

Harry cast a surprised and suspicious look at her. It was evident from the annoyed and indignant glance with which she answered the question that the Bigman monopoly was not agreeable. Peter Bigman frequently called after that, but Grace was seldom visible; his manner was then moody and gloomy, and his company not pleasant. When she did appear, with fine tact she managed that he should not monopolize her at the piano; failing in that, his natural gloom settled upon him, and he even scowled at her once or twice, as though she had done him an injury. After the sociable, for sometime, Harry had a pleasant time in the office. Instead of making his work as disagreeable as possible to him, Peter Bigman was exceedingly gracious to him, made his work as light as possible; called him to his desk on slight pretexts and chatted with him; made him his

confidant in office gossip—for there is always a great deal of gossip about an office as to changes, promotions, official blunders, as to whether this or that official is in favor at head-quarters, and so forth—arranged it so that his work was done an hour earlier than usual, then volunteered permission for him to go home that much earlier, surprising and delighting Harry's mother and the girls by coming so early. But when he discovered that Grace was inaccessible to him Harry's lines became hard again, and he was given hard statements, hard words, and gloom and scowls; for Bigman had connected in his mind Grace's avoidance of him as in some way the result of Harry's influence, for he could readily see that, although Harry submitted to his advances civilly, yet that he gained no real foothold on his feelings.

Peter Bigman had fallen deeply in love with Grace Constant. How such a self-lover could fall deeply in love with another, even of the opposite sex, is one of the conundrums of many-sided human nature; yet it may be that the reader can recall similar instances.

But Peter Bigman could not fail to observe that he had not awakened a corresponding feeling in the heart of Grace Constant. Her fine musical culture had first attracted him, and then the noble traits of her character. That she turned away from him only angered him, and made him more determined to possess her; for persistence, dogged persistence, was one

of the traits in his character; it was that trait more than any other by which he had climbed, in his estimation, into comparatively high positions in the world and church, places which, if some of the men in positions below him had had the persistence, as well as the other qualifications which they possessed, they would have occupied; but modest worth waits to be chosen, and does not push itself forward, consequently the best men are seldom found at the top, in these latter days, in Church, State, or business; and Church, State, and business suffer correspondingly for the need of them.

Being balked in meeting Grace at Mrs. Noble's, he persistently attended the series of sociables, where he constantly attempted to have her join in duets with him, to which, being earnestly requested by others, she was sometimes constrained to consent; but with womanly tact she avoided private interviews with him. At one of the sociables he overheard her remark to a friend, that she was going with Minnie to an exhibition of paintings at the Academy of Design on the afternoon of the following day. He arranged to leave the office, and went to the academy; there he met Minnie and Grace, apparently unexpectedly.

"Why, Mr. Bignian, how could you leave the office!" exclaimed Minnie.

"O there were some pictures here which I wished very much to see," he replied, in rather an embar-

rassed tone, for he was taken aback at Minnie's blunt question.

They did not ask him to join them, nevertheless he did so, making comments on the pictures, which were often absurd, for he knew nothing about pictures, and really cared nothing for them.

As they were standing in front of a beautiful winter scene a couple of Minnie's old friends, seated in another part of the room, observed her and beckoned to her. Minnie reluctantly went to them, for she knew that Grace did not want to be left alone with Peter Bigman. Peter saw his opportunity.

"Miss Constant," he said, "I do not like winter scenes; I love warm and beautiful spring scenes."

"I love winter scenes," she replied; "the mantle of snow is so white and pure and beautiful; it makes the most ugly and unclean things look attractive; it is like the love of God," she concluded, in a low, soft voice, as though speaking to herself.

"But it looks so cold," he objected, "like some hearts."

"When the glorious sun comes out and makes the landscape bright, sparkling, and beautiful, you do not think of the cold," she replied, ignoring the latter part of his remarks.

"Would that I were a sun with power to warm one human heart," he replied, trying to attract her attention by an appealing look; but she never turned from the picture as she answered,

"I think that there is but one sun that can rise upon and warm the world of each heart, and until that sun has arisen it is, as you say this picture is, cold."

Minnie came back, and they continued the tour of the gallery. Grace had meant to tell him there was no hope, by action and by word, and at the same time avoid giving him pain; but he was too obtuse to understand the full meaning of her words, and thinking over the matter from his egotistical point of view after he returned home, concluded that if he were to put in array his merits and the different positions he had attained in business and church, as well as his love for her, she must accept him. He accordingly wrote with great care the following letter and sent it to her:

"Friday evening.

"MISS GRACE CONSTANT:

"MY DEAR FRIEND: For some time *I* have thought it would be better for *me* to take unto *myself* a wife. *I* have been observing *my* female friends for some time with the view of making a selection. *I* beg leave to say that *I* think you would meet my wishes better than any one that *I* know. *I* wish to tell you also that *I* love you better than any other woman. *My* object in writing to you is to offer you *my* hand and heart. *I* have been thinking how happy *I* should be if you would accept both. *I* have now the highest position in the freight office of

my company, and *my* wife would have a better social position than the wife of any other person in *my* office. *I* also expect to be an elder in *my* church, and by having a wife *I* could better perform the duties of *my* office.

"*I* hope that *I* shall be gratified by your acceptance of *my* offer.

"Truly Yours,

PETER BIGMAN."

Grace Constant read this letter with a curled lip. She immediately sat down and wrote the following reply:

"*Saturday morning.*

"MR. PETER BIGMAN:

"MY DEAR SIR: Your note of yesterday has been received. While I thank you for the offer which you have made me, I feel sure in my mind, that, in the present state of my feelings toward you, I cannot accept it. I beg leave, therefore, to decline, with thanks, the honor.

"I remain yours truly, GRACE CONSTANT."

She then took the letter and its answer and showed them to Mrs. Noble, and asked her if she had done right.

"Perfectly right, my love," smiling, and kissing her; "my Grace could have no feelings in common with such a bundle of conceit as Peter Bigman."

Grace said nothing about the proposal to Minnie or

Harry; but Mrs. Noble told Harry about it: she thought, as he was the man of the house, he should be told about it.

“The egotistical puppy!” said Harry, indignantly; “the idea of his aspiring for such a noble girl as our Grace!”

CHAPTER IV.

Harry Noble's ill health—Dakota pamphlet—Dakota letter—Harry Noble resigns—Mrs. Noble's opinion of clerkships—Peter Bigman's second rejection—Harry Noble bids farewell to the office.

IF Harry had a hard time before Peter Bigman's rejection, he had a much harder one afterward; and not only Harry, but all the clerks in the freight office were made to feel their chief's refusal, as far as he dare; for he did not torment all alike. Some of the clerks were put there by influential men, perhaps stockholders in the company; these he dared not molest or disturb seriously. He knew, if he did, the report of his actions would be likely to go where it would injure him; so even in his petty persecutions he was politic. There was a dark scowl on his face for many weeks; polite questions were generally answered with a growl. He worked hard himself, and made all the clerks work very hard. He had a contemptible custom of reporting every little incident that occurred in his department to the manager, and coloring the statement artfully to suit his own purposes. For instance, Harry made a statement for the manager one day in which the details were not given as he wished. "That's always the way with Harry Noble's reports, I can never get him to do

any thing right." Then he would go on and tell of little short-comings of Harry's in making up accounts, giving an exaggerated importance to them. On the contrary, when he wished to shield a stockholder's son, he would say very little about a mistake in his work, even if it was a serious one. Another thing, which he systematically did, was to shift his own mistakes on the clerks.

He worked Harry very hard, always found fault with his work, scowled at him, growled at him, and poured a continual stream of petty complaints about him into the ears of the manager.

Harry kept himself in a constant state of repression; sometimes he felt like picking up and shaking him, like a strong mastiff will sometimes pick up a little snapping, snarling cur that annoys him, give him a good shaking, then drop him and walk off unruffled, while the cur runs howling away. But if he did this he would lose his place, and if he lost his place the dear ones at home would suffer. It was drawing on toward winter now, and there was more need than ever for him to work.

The hard work and confinement of the office, as well as the repression of his feelings, began to tell on his health; after all, there is an eternal fitness about things, and Minnie could see, or rather feel, that it was being violated; she often said,

"It does seem as though something was wrong when a great, strong fellow like our Harry, over six

feet high, has to earn his living by bending over a desk in an office. Why, in olden times he would have been a warrior, or a hunter, or at least a Cincinnati.

Mrs. Noble observed Harry's failing health, and her fond mother's heart grieved in silence. Every little womanly kindness and attention those three loving woman could give him he received, and he felt that he was, indeed, blest in such a pleasant home, and resolved to endure the office persecutions for their sakes. Mrs. Noble set her active mind to work to try and find out a remedy. She was not willing that her darling boy's spirits should be broken and health destroyed if she could find a remedy. First she went to some of the old friends of her husband, to see if they could get a better and more congenial place for Harry. They received her kindly and listened to her patiently, but none of them could help her, and they generally advised that Harry should remain where he was until something should turn up which would suit him better; and so they dismissed her and the subject, thinking inwardly, doubtless, that Harry was doing as well as a bankrupt's son could be expected to do. As to advising him to wait until something turned up, it was equivalent to saying, politely, "I shall not bother to turn up any thing for him." When a man's friends advise him to wait until something turns up, the best thing he can do is to go and turn something up himself.

Failing among her friends in the city, she resolved to write to her two brothers. One had a plantation in Florida, and the other had a manufactory in St. Louis.

Her Florida brother wrote her a very kind letter in reply, and closed by saying that he had no employment that he could offer Harry, but he would be glad to have them all make him a long visit.

The St. Louis brother replied, that his manufactory was very busy, and every situation filled; he could not, therefore, offer Harry any employment at that time; should an opportunity occur in the future he would remember him; would she please accept the check for one hundred dollars which he inclosed.

During this time she scanned the papers closely to see if something was advertised which would suit Harry. All these efforts for his welfare she kept secret from Harry and the girls, for she did not wish to excite hopes in Harry only to disappoint him. One day she saw, in one of the dailies, an advertisement telling parties who wish to secure free homes in the West to write to Chicago for a pamphlet which would give all the particulars. She wrote, and received a pamphlet from one of the railroads describing the Territory of Dakota.

Now, railroads are not conducted on philanthropic principles; on the contrary, they seem to be conducted on quite opposite principles, and to leave the golden rule and all similar regulations out of sight

until brought to a sense of their obligations by the popular will, or by what is even more powerful—competition. It is a popular saying, that “Corporations have no souls.” But the saying is a fallacy, for the souls of the men who conduct the corporation are the souls of the corporation. And a man cannot be a member of a church, perhaps an official member, and perform his duties faithfully, and at the same time be an officer of a railroad or similar corporation, and do things that are unjust, dishonorable, and selfish, in the name of that corporation, and his personal character be free from sin. But, it is urged, no man is alone responsible; there is a chain, and one man is responsible for this part of the work and another for that, so that the responsibility cannot be fastened upon any one man. If you ask if he did a certain thing, he will reply, “I am responsible for part of it; the other parts were done in other departments.” But, Christian railroad man, and unchristian railroad man,—for both must answer at the same tribunal,—remember that when the final judgment is given by the Great Judge you, individually, will, doubtless, be held responsible for the whole of each wrong deed of which you have done but your official part; for if each official had not done his part, the deed could never have been consummated as a whole. You will be held responsible for oppressing your fellow-men. Hence we may look for some selfish purpose on the part of the railroad which invited people to free

homes in Dakota, and paid advertising bills, postage, and printing bills to get them to go there. You will not have to look far for the motive, for free government lands lie on the line of this road, and the homeseeker must travel over the road at high rates of fare to reach them. But the above arraignment is not to be considered to have been written because railroads issue flaming circulars inviting emigrants to ride over their roads at high rates to settle on government lands; that is one of the least of their sins.

Mrs. Noble read the railroad pamphlet, and became very much interested in Dakota. It really did seem as though there might be an opportunity for a young man, or even a young woman, to procure a home of their own, and to be independent of the dictation of others. It galled her terribly that her noble boy should be under the rule of a man so much his inferior in all noble qualities as Peter Bigman, and she felt willing to undergo privations that Harry might have an opportunity to make himself a place among men, which she felt he could never have in the office of the railroad company. She showed the pamphlet to Minnie and Grace, and they were very much pleased with the description given of Dakota and its opportunities. Mrs. Noble hesitated to show the pamphlet to Harry. She was sure he would be captivated with the pleasing description, and she felt that if he wanted to go she must let him go, and that she must go with him, which meant that the whole family must go.

Naturally she hesitated at this, for she had never been West, and it seemed a great undertaking. But one evening Harry found the pamphlet lying on the sitting-room table. He picked it up carelessly, saying, "What's this?" and then read from the handsome cover, aloud: "'United States of America—The Land of Promise—Dakota. How to Go, and What to Do when you Get There.'

"Well, that sounds good; I always thought Dakota was a cold and bleak country, with little rain and much snow, a land of buffaloes, blizzards, Sioux Indians, and prairie dogs, and here it is called the land of promise; but perhaps it is only a railroad promise, and that don't amount to much."

He opened the book and read snatches at intervals, making comments:

"'This vast Territory contains ninety-six and one half millions of acres of the best farming-lands to be found in North America—'

"That's a good start.

"'More extensive than France; twice as large as Great Britain and Ireland—'

"Much larger than I thought.

"'But Dakota is not only great in respect to its area. Its soil furnishes an unparalleled diversity of wealth. The miner is invited to the development of its mineral riches hidden for ages; the broad prairies and fertile valleys bid the husbandman welcome; and industries, in their manifold branches, stand waiting the

command of intelligence and energy, without respect to nationality, religion, or social condition—'

"The invitation is very general.

"'Its free lands (offered to settlers under the liberal homestead and other laws of the United States) are being rapidly disposed of—'

"There ought to be some left of that ninety-six millions of acres.

"'To the man desirous of casting his lot where success is certain to follow industry, and where all the advantages of an older settled country are afforded, *south-eastern* Dakota offers inducements incident to a region which is without a peer in all the internal and natural elements essential for a desirable locality to live in and grow up with—'

"That's me!"

"Would you like to go West?" Minnie inquired.

"Wouldn't I, though," he replied, giving a long whistle of delight over the prospect.

"But would you really like to go?" Grace inquired.

Harry had been speaking half-jocularly before, but he sobered down as he answered,

"Of course I could not give up my situation and go away and leave you girls and mother."

Mrs. Noble made no remarks; she kept on knitting; but she was listening intently. Harry continued reading the pamphlet, turning over the leaves and reading aloud, and making comments as before:

“‘In south-eastern Dakota the climate in many respects resembles that of Indiana, Ohio, Iowa; and southern Minnesota, with a greater number of sunny, and a less number of rainy, days. The summers are agreeable, and little inconvenience is experienced from heat, owing to the prairie breezes which prevail during the warmer months. The air is pure and dry in summer, clear and bracing in winter, and affords remarkable relief to persons suffering from incipient consumption, asthma, etc. Malarial diseases are wholly unknown. The winters are not severe—’

“If the writer tells the truth, it is a better country than I thought.”

“‘Stock-raising has become of considerable importance in Dakota. The wonderful growth of native grasses affords the richest food, and the nominal expense at which it can be cut and cured for winter use, not only renders stock-raising in Dakota quite as convenient, but more profitable than in more southern regions. Horses raised in the Territory are hardy and capable of great endurance. Sheep and hogs are raised successfully—’

“Wonder what kind of a ranch man or cow boy I would make, Minnie.”

“You are big and strong enough to make a good one, Harry.”

“‘The superior soil is capable of producing in endless varieties nearly every thing raised elsewhere. Its principal products, however, are wheat, corn, flax,

barley, oats, buckwheat, root crops, and hardy fruits. There is nothing except products peculiar to southern States that cannot be raised on the soil of southern and eastern Dakota.'

"It seems to me that the writer would find it hard to prove all that; but here he goes on about fences:

" 'The enormous expense of fencing, usually incident to farming, is dispensed with in Dakota, as no protection against stock is required. *Corrals* provide shelter at night, and in the day cattle are required to be herded. By this wise arrangement a useless and heavy expense is saved the settler—'

"It seems to me," said Minnie, "that it must be a very wild-looking country where there are no fences, even where there are settlers."

" 'Like all prairie countries, it is wanting in a sufficiency of timber for manufacturing purposes, and for fuel. However, the extensive coal fields of Iowa and the immense forests of Minnesota are abundantly ample to furnish the settlers of Dakota with an abundance of fuel and timber for all time to come, and the very low rates of transportation for these articles will enable the settler to obtain them at prices as low as any other part of the West.' "

"It seems that fuel is high; that must be quite a drawback in a country which, being so far north, must necessarily be cold and have a long winter," remarked the housewifely Mrs. Noble.

"Now we come to churches and schools," continued Harry.

"The church and school-house are among the first institutions of every new settlement, and the religious and educational advantages of the Territory are in keeping with its other advantages. Churches of all denominations are to be found throughout the southeastern portion of Dakota. The school system is all that could be desired, considering its recent settlement."

"Now that we have had the advantages of the country shown up at their best, we are next told how to obtain them. Here is a clause on homesteads," said Harry.

"The homestead laws provide a very simple yet certain way of securing a home at little expense—"

"That seems to strike our family purse exactly," said Minnie, laughingly.

"Under these laws every citizen, and persons of foreign birth who have declared their intention of becoming citizens, over the age of twenty-one, if single, or heads of families, can enter one hundred and sixty acres of surveyed land not mineral in character—"

"Does that clause include women?" inquired Grace.

"I don't know; let me look on a little further; here it is; yes.

"Single women over the age of twenty-one, and married women whose husbands have deserted them,

come within the provisions of the law, and can take homesteads ; and widows—’”

“Well! that is a noble law!” exclaimed Mrs Noble, with animation. “It gives the women an equal chance with the men ; even the poor widows may have a farm of their own.”

“Why, we could all have farms,” exclaimed Minnie, “for we all come under the provisions of the law ; for we are all unmarried and over twenty-one. O, I forgot, you are not quite twenty-one, Grace ; but never mind, I guess there will be a quarter section of land left for you when you reach the voting age.”

“But that is not all,” said Harry, after reading awhile to himself, “it seems that a citizen can get one hundred and sixty more acres by what is called the pre-emption law, and another one hundred and sixty acres under what is called the timber-culture law. Let me see : three times one hundred and sixty, that is four hundred and eighty. My! that would be a big farm ; why, one hundred and sixty acres more would make it a mile square. All the government charges for this immense farm is two hundred dollars for the pre-emption claim and the land-office fees for the entering of the land ; and all that it requires is six months’ residence on the pre-emption claim, and five years’ residence on the homestead claim, and the cultivation of ten acres of timber on the tree claim, besides the land-office fees. The time on the homestead

claim may, at the end of six months, be commuted for two hundred dollars. That certainly does seem a good chance for any one who has a good deal of pluck and a little money."

Harry's eyes flashed, and his cheek colored, as he said it, for his imagination carried him to the free life of the boundless West; but his countenance suddenly fell, for his mind came back to the little home circle about him and the duty that devolved upon him to sustain and to guard it. He never dreamed of these cultured women being willing or able to endure the hardships of a new country. His mother watched him closely, but said nothing, and soon they retired.

For Mrs. Noble to go West would be a great trial; it would be leaving her old associations, her friends, and all that hitherto she had held dear. Then the privations and hardships to be encountered she could not endure as easily as her young people. But when she saw Harry coming home apparently broken spirited, and with health declining day after day, it seemed to her that she would be willing to endure any thing rather than see her dear boy suffer. At this time she noticed in a religious paper, the organ of the Church to which she belonged, an advertisement by a minister, calling attention to Douglas County, Dakota, with a view of getting members of his denomination to settle there, and volunteering to send to parties who would remit him fifteen cents a map of Dakota, and important information for would-be settlers, in

regard to Douglas County, taking up government land, etc. Mrs. Noble sent him her address with the money, and in a few days received the following reply, with a map similar to the one she had:

“DES MOINES, IOWA, *February 8, 1883.*

“DEAR MAIAM: I send you map and pamphlet to-day. Carefully study the pamphlet, and it will tell you many things you want to know. I have correspondents in thirteen different States, many of whom expect to go to Douglas County in the spring. I have a letter from a gentleman in Michigan who went to Douglas County, January 21, and bought some claims. He writes, ‘I have seen a little of the great Territory, and confess I like it very well.’ There are two hundred and seventy claims yet. There are a few that can be bought two to eight miles from county-seat for \$100 to \$200 each. Then you take them just as if they had never been entered. Some would rather pay this than go ten or twelve miles and get just as good claims for the government fees, \$14, and \$5 paid surveyor who shows you government lands. We are working to get as much good society, as many religious families, as we can in our community. We have the best society I ever saw in any new country. Had Sunday-school last summer. The two hundred and seventy vacant claims in the county will all probably be taken by July or before. There will be good chances likely till May. Four

members of this Conference have claims there, and our families lived there last summer. My sister's children go two miles to school. They have not missed two days this winter. February 5 there had been only about six inches of snow altogether. It was cold; mercury has been twenty-two degrees below zero there. It has been cold here, and besides we have snow in such quantities as to cause a real railroad blockade. If you wish to have any further information you will ask any questions you please, and I will cheerfully answer them. My advice is to go and see the country for yourself. I expect to improve my place for a future home when I locate. Twenty-five years of constant service wears, and we want as good society as we can get, and we count on the readers of our Church papers as the most worthy. If you think of going West I shall be glad to help you all I can.

"Fraternally yours,

T. M. WALTON."

The most precise and personal information contained in this letter from so disinterested a source, confirmed Mrs. Noble in her half-formed purpose to go to Dakota with her family in the spring. The girls were pleased with the novelty and adventure of the undertaking. That evening she handed Harry the letter from the minister, telling him first about seeing the advertisement and writing to the minister. Harry read the letter eagerly. When he had read it

he turned to his mother and said, earnestly, "Mother, why did you write for this information?"

"Because I thought you might want to go to Dakota, and I thought this minister might be able to tell a good place to locate."

"But you know I can't go to Dakota and leave you and the girls here; I would not do it. At any rate I have not the money," he said, soberly.

"We are going with you, my dear, if you go, and I have a few hundred dollars that, perhaps, cannot be spent better than in emigrating to a more hopeful place for us all."

"It appears to me that it is you and the girls that are going to Dakota, and I am going with you," said Harry; "I never said I wanted to go to Dakota."

"My dear boy, it is not always necessary for those we love to express their wishes in words that we may understand them."

"But you and the girls could not stand that rough kind of life."

"My dear, the women who go to Dakota are famous for enduring what those at ease at home think great hardships, and we propose to add our names to the noble band."

"Is that a pun on the noble?" said Minnie, laughingly.

This question made them all laugh. Then they began eagerly to discuss Dakota and the best ways of getting there. Before they retired that night it was

fully decided that they would go to Dakota early in the next month, and that Harry should hand his resignation to Peter Bigman next day.

On the following morning Harry laid a formal letter on Peter Bigman's desk, tendering his resignation, to take effect one month from date. It seemed to him that it was the pleasantest thing he had ever done, and that a great load was taken off his heart. His spirits rose, and from that day his spirits and his health improved.

Peter Bigman read the resignation with amazement. He thought the Noble family were very poor, and that Harry was a fixture in his office, perforce, by circumstances. After he had recovered from his amazement he was angry. One of the clerks told him that "Harry and the whole family were going to Dakota, Harry had told him so."

"Not if I can help it," he muttered between his teeth.

The truth is that he had not given up the idea of winning Grace yet; his persistent nature would not take a first denial for a final answer.

After reading her note many times it seemed to him that it might be slightly ambiguous, and there might still be the shadow of a shadow of a chance; so he did not give up. He thought, planned, and studied how he might delay the Noble family, or prevent them from going entirely. He did not see any way by which he could oppose them successfully; so

he concluded to try the other tack, and try and win them by kindness. Such politic kindness is not usually greatly appreciated by the recipients, even when by the force of circumstances they are sometimes obliged to profit by it. He made it his business to leave the office that afternoon and to call on Mrs. Noble.

Mrs. Noble was greatly surprised at the call. She asked him to be seated in the sitting room ; the girls were both out. Peter Bigman at once plunged into business.

"Mrs. Noble," he said, "it was with surprise and regret that I received Harry's note of resignation this morning."

"We are going to Dakota," Mrs. Noble replied, quietly.

"Is it because Harry is dissatisfied with his position in the office?"

"Partly that; indeed, I may say largely that," said Mrs. Noble, betraying some warmth.

"My object in calling to see you this afternoon, Mrs. Noble, was to inform you that I think that can be remedied, partially at any rate," he said, blandly.

"In what way, may I ask?"

"One of *my* clerks is going into another department next month, and *I* intend to give Harry his desk. The salary will be seventy dollars, an advance of ten dollars per month."

"Your offer comes too late, Mr. Bigman; and, be-

sides, it was not the salary alone with which Harry was dissatisfied ; " her gentle face showing more anger than many persons had seen on it.

Peter Bigman's countenance fell ; he cowered, and his eyes fell before the steady gaze of righteous wrath in the eye of this indignant mother.

" But let that pass," she said directly, recovering her self-control, " outside of all office reasons I have good reasons of my own why I do not want my boy to remain in the position of a clerk. I do not consider the work of an ordinary clerk a very manly employment ; a few rise to good positions, but the thousands are the veriest routine drudges. It is said that it is a good thing for a young man to go into an office for a year or two to be drilled into business methods ; I will not dispute it ; but at the end of that time he had better leave. He had better be a farmer, mechanic, or tradesman, if he has not the means or ability to become a professional man, for in those employments there are many opportunities to develop physical and mental strength, and to be a man among men ; but where is a clerk ever more than a clerk, even at the head of his department ? "

Mrs. Noble was speaking very earnestly now, and did not intend to be personal ; but Peter Bigman winced.

" Many men in this country who have risen by hard work from humble positions to comparative wealth, having observed that clerks in offices are

always in warm apartments, often surrounded by many comforts, and apparently working leisurely, unmindful of the turmoil of business and unexposed to the inclemency of the seasons, think that they will confer a favor on their sons by screening them from the hardships through which themselves have passed, by making clerks of them. Better had they turned them into the busy marts of trade than make them the routine machine of an office, with a low salary, and after awhile utterly at the mercy of their superior officers, because they have wives and families to support. Their position seems almost hopeless, for when one after another drops out of the ranks, with dyspepsia, consumption, or debility, an army rushes to take his place. Why, I read in a paper the other day that there were five thousand clerks out of employment in New York. No! Mr. Bigman, I want my Harry to have a chance to be a man, and not a mere machine in the tread-mill of an office of a great corporation!"

Peter Bigman looked at her with interest and amazement while she delivered these remarks. He was surprised that the lady-like gentlewoman could be so thoughtful and logical.

"You have thought deeply on the subject," he said, as he arose to leave.

"We are apt to think deeply where the welfare and even the lives of our dear ones are at stake," she said, as she bowed him out.

In the month which followed Peter Bigman tried in every way to ingratiate himself with Harry. He wished, if possible, to get into the good graces of the family again. Harry treated him with civility, but coldly, for he knew that nothing but self-interest would make Peter Bigman change his tactics.

Peter endeavored to conciliate Grace by sending her presents. First, he sent her a handsome book, which she returned, then beautiful gold bracelets of unique design, which she returned; then he sent her a beautiful bouquet of cut flowers, with his card, and instructed the boy-bearer to hand them in at the door and run away. She was obliged to keep these, and in a day or two he sent her another bouquet.

He still met her at sociables, where she always treated him with politeness, but avoided speaking with him alone. But at the last sociable before they started for Dakota, he maneuvered so skillfully that he succeeded in speaking to her alone in the conservatory.

"Miss Constant," he said, imploringly, "let me offer myself to you once more."

"I must refuse you, for I do not love you," she replied. Others drew near them and his last chance had failed. His egotism had received a dreadful shock.

On Harry's last day in the office, when five o'clock came, and the work of the day was over, and the clerks had hung up their office coats and donned the

others, they crowded around Harry to bid him good-bye.

"Wish I was in your place," said a gray-haired clerk, who had grown gray in the service, a routine drudge, hopeless of promotion, and with a small family dependent upon him, expected to bring them up and clothe them as young ladies and gentlemen on the wages of a good mechanic.

"Would go with you if I could," said a fine-looking young clerk, with a widowed mother and two little sisters dependent on his small salary.

"Catch me going out of a nice office to such a place as Dakota, to fight blizzards, cyclones, and Indians!" exclaimed a dapper little clerk, dressed in full style. He carried a little cane with a female foot in ivory for a handle, and had just lighted a good cigar; it cost him all his salary to live, and more, for he was always in debt.

"O, you haven't got enough sand in you to go!" exclaimed a forward little office boy; "wish I was a man, I'd go."

They were all sorry to have Harry leave the office, for he was a favorite.

"Wish you luck!" "Hope you will come back a millionaire, or a cattle king!" "Write to us!" and such expressions, were spoken to him as they all shook hands with him.

Even Peter Bigman pretended to be gracious, and bade him "Good-bye with good wishes."

CHAPTER V.

Journeying to Dakota—Mitchell—Dakota Hotels—Plankinton—
Journey to Land View—An ex-clerk of A. T. Stewart & Co. driver—
Land View—Hotel accommodations.

THE household furniture had been sold ; farewells had been said ; many tears had been shed at parting with old friends, and breaking up old associations. We do not know how dear old friends are until we leave them, or what a hold old associations have upon us until we go away from them. But it was all over now, and they were on board the "New York and Chicago limited Express" train on the great Pennsylvania Railroad, with all their worldly goods stowed away in trunks in the crowded baggage-car, and themselves ticketed through to Mitchell, Dakota.

They had discussed among themselves, before starting, whether it would not be better to buy a second-class ticket and travel on a slower train, on the score of economy ; but Mrs. Noble settled that question by saying that, although the fare would be less for a second-class ticket, yet they would gain time by going on a faster train ; and by taking a sleeping-car they would avoid the promiscuous crowd and discomfort of the ordinary passenger cars, and arrive at the end of their journey in a much better condition to

face the hardships through which they would be obliged to pass. This reasoning was good, but underlying it was another which did not form itself into words. Mrs. Noble had spent the greater portion of her life in refined and elegant society, and although, for the sake of her family, she was willing to endure the hardships of frontier life, yet she shrank intuitively from being brought into close contact for days and nights with a promiscuous throng of home-seekers. But she found that even traveling in a sleeping-car she could economize, and had prepared a large lunch basket, which would be food enough for the whole journey ; with, perhaps, one or two warm meals at the dining places on the road.

How comfortable it was sitting in those elegant coaches, so very luxuriously furnished, gazing out of the large windows at the scenery so swiftly flying by over the Jersey flats ; through busy, manufacturing Newark, and the crowded depot at Elizabeth ; dashing across sandy New Jersey ; rushing through many quiet villages ; halting at staid New Brunswick ; then dashing on again through the flying scenery, and directly the train was in Philadelphia, the Quaker city ; and only two hours since it started. It has dashed over the ground which, in the near-by olden time, would have taken relays of good horses nine hours to have traversed ; while the passengers comfortably enjoyed themselves by reading, conversing, sleeping, or gazing out of the windows at the flying scenery, scarcely

thinking of danger; so well has modern ingenuity and invention guarded human life. How different from the old stage-coach! How fast we live in these latter days and with what ease and comfort we travel! This poor family seeking a home in the West commands comforts that a monarch could not in the last century.

The train is soon off again for Harrisburg, the capital of the Key-stone State, on the banks of the beautiful Susquehanna; early in the afternoon it is there, and away again toward the smoking city of Pittsburg. Now that our friends are fairly started and have broken the old ties, they begin to have a sense of freedom and independence. Are they not fast flying toward the boundless West, to fight out life's battles there?

Have they not done much already in making the effort and the start? Will not the same resolute will achieve them victory in the new country?

Now the train has reached Altoona, at the foot of the grand old Alleghanies, and soon, drawn by two powerful locomotives, begins to climb their rugged sides. How interesting and even exciting it is to ascend and descend high and noble mountains. The passengers all feel it, for they are watching the scenery from the car windows. Now the train is passing around the Horseshoe curve. What a grand view! How rapidly the train flies down the mountain side; throttle valve in, steam cut off; gravity is the power.

Now the train is down the mountain, and before nine o'clock is in Pittsburg. After leaving that city, our travelers retire to their comfortable berths, and, tired out by the fatigue and excitement of the day, are soon fast asleep, despite the novel surroundings. Meanwhile the tireless iron steed travels on—out of Pennsylvania into Ohio. Through the long hours of the night the mighty, unwilling slave, steam, in his struggles to be free, bears his captor, man, through the noble State of Ohio, and in the early morning is reined up that the passengers may take breakfast at Fort Wayne, Indiana. Breakfast over and the train is on the way again, on the last stretch for Chicago, through the uninviting swamps and lowlands of northern Indiana. Once through Indiana, and into the north-east corner of Illinois, and the engineer soon pushes in his throttle-valve at the depot in Chicago, at eleven o'clock in the morning—just twenty-six hours since the train left the banks of the Hudson River—having passed through four States and entered the fifth.

Our travelers only had an hour's time in Chicago, and, consequently, had not time enough to explore the wonders of that great, young, giant city of the West. They traveled across the great railroad State of Illinois until they reached the Mississippi River at Savanna. Crossing to Sabula, they followed the great father of waters toward his source, on his western bank in the State of Iowa up to M'Gregor, which is opposite Prairie du Chien, in the State of Wisconsin ; passing

through the fine city of Dubuque early in the evening. Leaving the Mississippi at M'Gregor, the railroad (C. M. & St. P.) takes a course due west across the State of Iowa into Dakota. Our friends, however, did not see much of eastern Iowa, as they had retired to their berths in the sleeping-car. They were, however, aroused early in the morning, by the porter announcing that the train would stop twenty minutes for breakfast at Algona, and the sleeping-car would be dropped from the train there.

At Algona, accordingly, they went into one of the regular passenger coaches, carrying their satchels, or "grips," in western parlance, and wraps. They had difficulty in finding seats, for there were but two cars, and they were quite full. The passengers looked fatigued and tired, for they had not had a comfortable sleep, as those in the sleeping-car; on the contrary, two persons were seated in many of the seats, and, consequently, were obliged to catch what little sleep they could in an upright position. A number of the passengers were women, and some of them had little children; they had the hardest time of all, and some of them looked very tired. There was a general exit at Algona for breakfast, and after a warm breakfast and a little exercise on the platform, the passengers generally looked refreshed. The conductor gave all plenty of time; indeed, he seemed in no hurry whatever to get his train started again. It seemed that, as well as dropping the sleeping-car, all undue subserv-

ience to the time-table had been dropped also ; or perhaps, as it afterward turned out, the time-table itself was not exacting, but allowed plenty of time in which to make the distance between stations. A stop was made again for dinner at a small town, with a short business street, composed of a curious medley of wooden shops. There was, however, a good sized hotel, probably owned by the railroad, where a good dinner was served.

During the day our travelers had plenty of time and opportunity to study their fellow-passengers and to make their acquaintance, for traveling all day in a car with the same people is apt to make most of them sociable ; indeed, they were almost obliged to be sociable in self-defense ; for the scenery of northern Iowa is not attractive, being poor prairie land, in many places swampy, with villages few and far between ; hence all amusement must be found within the car. People read for awhile, but tire of that, and looking about them, find their fellow-passengers in about the same condition of mind as themselves ; how easy, then, for two forlornites to combine and produce comfort.

Harry's first acquaintance was a man dressed in shiny, seedy, black, much-soiled clothes. He seemed to be an Americanized Norwegian or Swede, had very light hair, long, and in much disorder. He told Harry that he had settled in Nebraska several years before, and had succeeded in becoming the owner of

several fine farms. His present business was to attend a Second Adventists' camp-meeting, at a place called Parker, in Dakota. Naturally the conversation turned upon his belief. He believed that the second advent was near at hand, but did not go so far as to fix the day. Among other things, he undertook to prove by the Bible that the modern locomotive and telegraph were foretold, and these were some of the signs of the last days. Harry asked for chapter and verse, whereupon he took out a Bible from his grip, and showed Harry Nahum ii, 4: "The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings."

Harry called his attention to the heading of the chapter as fully explaining the meaning and connection of the words: "The fearful and victorious armies of God against Nineveh." He acknowledged that it referred to the destruction of Nineveh, but thought it also referred, figuratively, to the present time. He left Harry before a great while to talk to other Adventists, evidently going to Parker to attend the camp-meeting, but not before offering to sell his farms in Nebraska to Harry, and naming the price of each one.

Sitting alone in the seat in front of him Harry had noticed a small, rather stoutish man, quite fashionably dressed. He had not seemed so free at making acquaintances as most of the other passengers, but

after the Adventist had gone, he made a remark or two about the journey, and seemed inclined to converse. Harry, nothing loth, entered into conversation with him, and finding he knew something about the country, asked him questions about locating government land. The gentlemen answered his questions very politely, and then told him that he himself was securing government land. He stated his methods of procedure as follows:

“I am in business in a town in Illinois, and I am homesteading a claim in Dakota, in Buffalo County. My nearest railroad station is Kimball, on this road; from there I must drive twenty miles to my claims, for I have taken up a tree claim and homestead, and the two claims join each other. I have built a \$25 wooden shanty on my homestead, and go and live there for a day or two every month. It is an all-day journey, and my railroad fare, each trip, is \$25, so that my railroad fare alone to take up these claims will be \$150, for I must keep this up for six months; at the end of that time, by paying \$200, I can commute my time on the homestead and get a title from the government. The tree claim I can't get a title to for eight years, and I must plant some trees on it; but if I comply with the law I as good as own it. I shall be then, at the end of six months, the owner of 320 acres of rich prairie land, which would probably sell for \$1,000; so, you see, that my time and money will have been well spent.”

"I thought you had to live on the land six months before the government would give you a title?" Harry said.

"O if you are there a day or two a month, that makes it a residence within the letter of the law."

It was a new country to Harry, and he did not know whether that was true or not, but it seemed to him an india-rubber sort of law that could be stretched in that way.

Meanwhile the ladies had been making some acquaintances. On the opposite side of the car from Mrs. Noble sat a comparatively young couple, with three small children. They were all coarsely, but cleanly and neatly, dressed. They had not been traveling in the sleeping-car during the night, consequently they were tired taking care of the children, although they were remarkably good children. Mrs. Noble and the young ladies took charge of the children awhile to relieve the tired mother, who was very grateful for the relief and rest. She told Mrs. Noble that they had taken up some government land three years ago, had built a little house, and had done fairly well; their crops had been pretty good, and they all enjoyed good health, and liked living on the prairies very much. They were just returning from a visit to her relatives, which had lasted several weeks, and which they had all enjoyed; but they were all glad to get back to the farm. The children were fine, hearty, healthy, good-natured little ones. The young

ladies also made the acquaintance of a very pleasant and pretty, well-dressed young lady, who was accompanying her father, who was on a trip to buy some land. He did not want to take up government land, but wanted to buy it after a title had been gotten to it by a settler. He was the principal of a high school in one of the Illinois towns, and wished to retire from teaching in a few years, and thought it a good time to buy land in Dakota, while it was cheap, so that he might have a home of his own in his old age.

About the middle of the afternoon people began to say to each other, "Now we will soon be in Dakota." And soon the train ran slowly over a wooden trestle-bridge, across the big Sioux River, from the State of Iowa into the Territory of Dakota.

We are always crossing rivers in our lives, sometimes into a joyful country beyond, and sometimes into a sorrowful one; and so it will doubtless be until we can say gladly in our hearts the refrain of the well-known hymn, "One more river to cross."

Crossing this river had peculiar significance to our emigrants. They had crossed many small rivers on the journey and some large ones, even the grand Mississippi; but the crossing of none of them had the effect upon their minds which crossing this boundary river had. And why? Because they left all this country through which they had passed, including their old home, behind, and entered for the first time

upon the soil of the Territory which they expected would be their future home. For weeks of time, and over many hundreds of miles, they had been looking toward it, and now they had arrived upon the very soil; upon the battle-ground of their future joys and sorrows, successes and defeats.

There was but little change in the scenery; it was the same rolling prairie through which they had journeyed for a long time, sparsely settled, very little cultivated land, a settler's shanty here and there, and at long distances apart railroad stations, with a village of a few scattered houses. Canton and Alexandria were quite busy little towns. The train was due at Mitchell at 5:10 P. M. As they neared that place Harry stopped the conductor as he was passing down the aisle, and inquired,

"Which is the best hotel to put up at in Mitchell?"

The conductor hesitated, as though loth to answer, and then said, in a deprecatory way,

"Well, there is the Alexander Mitchell House, the Sanborn House, and another one," naming it, "all about the same. I have been told that the Mitchell House is the best."

The conductor volunteered no further information, and passed on, looking rather cross. Harry wondered why.

Harry then inquired of his acquaintance, who was taking up a claim in Buffalo County,

"Which is the best hotel to stop at in Mitchell?"

"Well, the fact of the matter is none of them are very good, although there are two that claim to be. The amount of the business is, that if you go to one you will wish you had gone to the other," he replied, smiling.

Harry was rather puzzled which to go to, but having heard that the Mitchell House was best, in the first instance, he determined to go there. Promptly on time, the train arrived at Mitchell; it had been loitering along all day, but, like the old-time stage-coaches, which walked their horses over country roads, and whipped them up to a brisk trot when they came to the towns, it entered Mitchell at high speed, with ringing bell and blowing whistle.

The depot was a long, low, drab-colored wooden building, with a broad platform. There were a good many loungers waiting for the arrival of the train from the East, which was the event of the day.

Two dilapidated 'buses were backed up to the platform, also a couple of express wagons, and the drivers made a lively din inviting passengers to "take a free 'bus," to their respective houses, and have their baggage expressed.

Harry escorted the ladies to the "Mitchell House 'bus," which would not hold all the applicants, consequently it was given up mainly to the ladies, and the gentlemen took their "grips" and walked to the hotel, although the driver hallooed to them,

"I'll come back for you if you will wait just a few minutes!"

Harry found that Mitchell was composed mainly of one street, quite long and wide, and the stores and business places were mainly wooden buildings, one and two stories high, although there were a few quite large buildings, and several brick and stone ones—one quite handsome stone bank. There seemed to be a great many stores of all kinds, and a great many signs, real estate office signs being very numerous. The private residences were scattered on back streets, and some were pretty cottages. There were no inclosed yards about them, and they were built far apart on the prairie. There was a wooden pavement in the street, which was a great advantage, for it was a cold, blustering March day. Harry had to walk nearly the whole length of the street before he came to the hotel, which he found to be a large, high frame structure, painted white, with the name of the house painted in large black letters on the side exposed to the street. Mitchell was but between two and three years old, and claimed a population of between two and three thousand, and the prospects of rapid growth during the season were very good. When Harry arrived at the hotel he found the ladies seated in a comfortable, small parlor, and went at once to the office to register their names. There was quite a crowd waiting around the counter in the office to get their turn to register. It was a large, bare-looking

room, with a writing-desk on one side and a news-stand in one corner.

When Harry's turn came to register, the clerk told him the house was very full, and they would have to put up with the best accommodations he could give them. It is useless to describe the house, but the Noble family confirmed the prophecy of the conductor and the Buffalo County homesteader, for they all wished they had gone to the other hotel.

In the morning Harry took a walk about the town ; but it was such a cold, blustering March day, the ladies did not care to venture out. When the United States Land-office opened he went there to inquire if he could locate land in Douglas County. The land-office was a long, low, wooden building. The office was a long room. Fronting him on entering the room was a counter extending across the room, with a wire railing, and with a couple of openings at which stood a couple of clerks, answering questions and attending to the business of the office. The space between the counter and the door was limited, and was filled with land agents and land hunters—people who had come from many States to procure homes in the West. Men wishing to locate land would tell what township they wished to locate in, and the clerk would sell them a map of the township, showing which lands had been located and which were still vacant. Harry noticed that the clerks knew the land agents, and often gave them prece-

dence in their business. When Harry got to the counter he asked the clerk if there was any vacant land in Douglas County?

"Douglas County is not in our district," the clerk replied.

Harry was taken aback, he thought there must be a mistake, and inquired, hastily,

"What district is it in?"

"Yankton District."

"Is there any vacant land in this district?" Harry inquired.

"O yes! would you like to locate?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"As near the town as I can get."

"The land is all taken up near the town; you will have to go back several miles."

"Well, I will see about it," said Harry; "I came out here to locate in Douglas County."

"Good county," said the clerk, as Harry stepped aside and another took his place. Harry walked back to the hotel, found the ladies in the parlor, and told them that he had been to the land office.

"O, I suppose you have all our claims picked out," said Minnie.

"No, I could not do it here. Douglas County is not in this land district; it is in the Yankton District."

"How unfortunate!" said Mrs. Noble. "I hoped

we could get maps of the land here, and then go to Douglas County and locate it."

"I thought so, too," said Harry; "but the clerk says it is in the Yankton District, and, of course, he knows."

"What shall we do now," inquired Mrs. Noble, "go to Yankton or Douglas County first?"

"I think we had better go on to Douglas County first. We can get the surveyor or one of the land agents to show us the claims, and afterward go to Yankton and take up the land, or make entry on the land, as they call it out here."

"When can we start for Douglas County?" Grace inquired.

"Not until to-morrow morning; then we take the train to a place on the railroad named Plankinton, and from there we go to a place called Land View in the stage or mail wagon; but there is no telling whether the stage starts from Plankinton to-morrow or not. Nobody here seems to know much about it, except that there is a stage, and that it runs two or three times a week."

"Can't you find out at the hotel office or the post-office?"

"No, nobody seems to know; if you ask one person he sends you to another, and he don't know quite as much as the first one; fact is, every one is so new here that a man who has been here a few months is an old resident."

"Remember, Harry dear," said Minnie, jokingly, "that we have emigrated from the land of time-tables and steady habits."

Harry went out a good deal during the day, notwithstanding the weather, called in some of the stores and a number of the real-estate offices. He found the people exceedingly free and communicative, and disposed to do all in their power to assist strangers and land hunters; but he found that the rapid growth of Mitchell, and its bright future prospects, was the theme of every one, and many urgent reasons why he should settle in or near the place were given him by various people.

He met several persons from New York and Pennsylvania, and a great many from Iowa and Wisconsin. He found among them all a general feeling of good fellowship, and a very general desire to help each other's interests and the interest of Dakota. He was surprised at the good order of the place; there did not seem to be much drinking, and he saw no loafers or rowdies. Every one seemed to be busy and pleased with his bright prospects; every one seemed to own land, or was in various stages of becoming its possessor. It seemed to Harry that the proportion of the land-owners who actually lived on their claims for six months must be small, indeed. In one of the real-estate offices Harry found the agent to be a very large, stout, and jolly gentleman, but remarkably shrewd. Harry just dropped in to talk about

the country, its prospects, and so forth, as the real-estate agents generally invited strangers to do.

"What is land worth near Mitchell?" inquired Harry.

"O, from six hundred to two thousand dollars, according to distance from town, location, and so forth. Want some land?"

"I came into this country to settle and to take up lands, and I want to find out all I can about the country."

"Well, if you want to get on a good quarter section near town I will start a contest on one, carry it through, and give you peaceful possession for fifty dollars."

"I would not care to make my entrance into the country by beginning a contest."

"Well, then, I will sell you the relinquishment on a tree claim near town for four hundred dollars, or I will sell you one near Huron for fifty dollars."

Harry shook his head.

"Young man, I like your looks; now I will tell you what you had better do. Buy some deeded land, then you get a perfect title at once. I have a nice quarter section, in a good location, I will sell you for eight hundred dollars."

Harry did not acquiesce.

"Now, I'll tell you just what you will do, mark my word; you'll hunt around until you find a piece of land that you think will suit you, then you'll go

to the land-office and enter upon it ; then you'll go back and build a claim shanty. After living there a week or two you'll look over the prairie, and say, ' Good gracious ! have I got to live here six months ? ' After a while you'll get tired of it and leave it. Now go and look over the Territory, and then come back and buy a piece of deeded land from old Brown."

This was all said so good-naturedly that Harry could not help laughing as he left the office.

In the street Harry met a very rugged, dilapidated specimen of humanity, who wanted to sell his claim for eight hundred dollars. He said he had just proved up in the land-office, and wanted to sell and could now give a good title, as he had lived on it six months. Harry asked if there were any improvements on it.

" A sod house and five acres plowed," he answered.

Harry, of course, declined to purchase.

At half past five o'clock the next morning they were waiting at the depot for the train to Plankinton. It was a freight train and arrived on time, but it was slow in getting started again ; spent a good deal of time in shifting cars. At last, however, the passengers heard the welcome cry of " All aboard," and took their seats in the caboose. This was a car divided in the center by a partition which separated the baggage from the passengers. The seats ran along the sides, like the seats of an omnibus, and were separated into single seats by iron arms. There was a

wood stove in the center, in which there was a blazing hot fire ; but, as the day was raw and blustering, it was very comfortable, excepting to those who sat facing it ; they were almost roasted. In this train the Noble family took another step backward from the comforts of Eastern travel. No luxurious sleeping-cars on this train ; not even a passenger-car with separate seats ; just a caboose, such as train-men use, at the end of a long, slow, freight train. The Noble ladies were the only females on the train. The remaining passengers were a promiscuous party. There was a fashionably dressed Chicago drummer ; a minister of one of the great orthodox Protestant denominations, and employed by its Domestic Missionary Society, who had come to the frontier to start churches of his denomination ; several young men who had come to Dakota to locate land ; a farmer who had been out last fall and located his land, had returned " back East " for his stock, household goods, and his family. He had hired a freight car, had stored his worldly effects in it, and was accompanying it to his new home, traveling with it day and night, encountering all the tedious and vexatious delays of a freight-train journey, and having no opportunity to sleep except when sitting bolt upright. He looked dirty, travel-worn, and tired ; was dressed in old and faded clothing. When he conversed, however, he showed himself to be a very sensible and well-informed farmer. His freight car was the second one

from the locomotive. In it were four good, strong farm horses and two good milch cows. On the floor of the car was a quantity of good pine lumber, to build him a little house, and he had several barrels filled with anthracite coal. The remainder of the car was filled with farming implements and his few household goods. His family were coming on the next train. There was also a land agent, from Plankinton, in the car, and, ever mindful of his business, the topic of his conversation—for he talked a great deal and very loudly—was the prospects of Dakota, and particularly of Plankinton.

“Why,” he said, “Plankinton is not two years old yet, and is quite a town. We have two good-sized hotels, two banks, and three newspapers. There will be a large handsome church finished before the season is over, and there is no telling how many more will be started this summer; for all the large denominations of the country are alive to the importance of occupying new territory, and are occupying all available points rapidly. Now is the time to buy, either city lots or land; lots are going off like hot cakes. Why, you can double your money in a year; many have done so.”

Plankinton is twenty-four miles from Mitchell, on the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad. This road extends forty-four miles farther to Chamberlain, on the Missouri River. The river has not been bridged here from the fact that the road cannot be

extended on the western side because it consists of the Sioux Indian Reservation. By the terms of the treaty between the Indians and the United States, no railroad is allowed to traverse their country. As their Reservation lies between the Missouri River and the rich Black Hills, passage through it is greatly coveted by railroad managers. A new treaty is now in process of negotiation, by which it is expected that a number of millions of acres of this Reservation will be thrown open for settlement in a few months, and then the emigrants and the railroads will pass in together.

Chamberlain may be said to be lying in wait for this event. No sooner is the news flashed over the wires that the Reservation is thrown open for settlement, than men, who have been awaiting the news for months, will cross the river, and in a few hours there will, probably, be hundreds of claim shanties put up. The claim shanty is the white man's seal of possession, and the token of the relinquishment of the Indian, forever, of the land of his forefathers.

The Noble ladies rather shrank at first from the close contact with so promiscuous a traveling public, but they soon discovered that even the roughest of these men treated them kindly, and even politely, and that their presence had the effect to tone down the roughness of their manners and expressions. Shortly before arriving at Plankinton, Harry said to the conductor, "Which is the best hotel in Plankinton?"

The conductor smiled, and looked at the ladies when he answered.

"O! there's two, I don't think there is much difference in 'em."

"Which had we better go to?"

"Well, I don't know. If you go to one, you will wish you had gone to the other."

He moved on with a sardonic smile.

When the train stopped at the frame depot, and the Noble family descended, they found themselves in a small village on the flat prairie.

There was a wide straggling street, built mostly of wooden one and two story houses. As they walked up the street they discovered that these buildings were mainly stores and real-estate offices. They arrived at one of the hotels and did not like the looks of it, so they walked on to the other, which looked still worse, so they returned to the first one and registered there. The conductor's opinion of Plankinton hotels was corroborated by the experience of the Noble family. The rooms and beds were poor; the table was worse. Harry soon learned that the stage did not leave for Land View until the next morning.

That night the ladies occupied one small room, with two beds in it. Harry was obliged to occupy a bed in a room with several others. The house was crowded, and to get a bed at all was a favor. But the landlord did the best he could for Harry; he told him that he would put him in a room with clean

men, meaning that he would put him in a room occupied by merchants, drummers, and persons who dressed pretty well, in contradistinction to farmers, drivers, and workmen, by whose avocations their clothes were naturally soiled. But although a distinction was made in the sleeping-rooms, none was made in the dining-room; all ate at the same tables.

The next morning at seven o'clock the stage, which carried the mail to Land View and neighboring post-offices, drove up to the hotel. Harry found that there were seats for the three ladies only. The landlord told him that a team from Land View was going down with lumber that morning, and the driver was staying at the house, and would take him and his trunks, for less than the stage would charge, if he would put up with the inconvenience.

It was "Hobson's choice" with Harry, so he saw the stage start and leave him to follow after on the lumber wagon. The stage was simply a spring wagon with piano box body and black oil-cloth top. The day was rather cold, but the sun shone, and the passengers rather enjoyed the ride over the Dakota prairie. The distance is twenty-five miles. The driver was a large pleasant man and seemed willing to talk.

Mrs. Noble asked him how long he had been in Dakota.

"Only since last fall."

"How do you like the country?"

"Well, it is a little new and rough, but I like it right well."

"Have you prospered since you have been here?"

"Well, I should say I had. When I came here all the money I had was thirteen dollars, now I have a homestead and a tree claim, and a little house on my homestead; besides that I have bought out this mail route, and expect to have it paid for in a few months."

"You certainly have prospered; have you a family?"

"Yes, a wife and four children. I have a sister-in-law, too, who owns a homestead and a tree claim next to us."

When not talking the driver spent his time in singing hymns.

Mrs. Noble finally asked him if he was a church member.

"No! my wife is; I go with her sometimes."

It was not long before he swore at the horses. Mrs. Noble concluded he was right, that he was not a church member. About half past eleven o'clock the driver pointed with his whip and said, "See them houses on the top of that hill over thar?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's Land View."

In about an hour they drove up to the Land View hotel.

Land View was on a roll of the prairie, and con-

sisted of about half a dozen houses, hotel, blacksmith shop, several stores, and the post-office.

The hotel was a wooden building, twenty feet long by fifteen feet wide, and two stories high. It had no chimney, the stove-pipe projecting above the roof answered that purpose. The hotel was divided into four rooms, two above and two below. One of the rooms below was a small room used as a kitchen, where the cooking and washing were done. The other room was used as a parlor, sitting-room, office, dining-room and men's sleeping-room, when the house was full, which it was all the time then. The two rooms up stairs were bedrooms.

The Noble ladies alighted from the stage, and were received at the door by the landlady, a small, pleasant, and evidently educated woman. The door opened into the front room, which was filled with men and women eating their dinner. The landlady, however, took them up stairs and told them to take off their things. "The house is full all of the time," she said, pleasantly, "and you will have to put up with a great many inconveniences. There are crowds of people coming every day to hunt land, and the country is so new yet that there is not house-room enough to accommodate them properly."

"We are land hunters, also," replied Mrs. Noble, in rather a dismayed voice, "so we must endeavor to make the best of circumstances."

The landlady then went down stairs and said she

would call them as soon as there was room at the table.

"Did you ever see such a crowd in such a little house, mother?" said Minnie.

Directly they heard a big dinner bell ringing at the foot of the stairs, and went down to dinner.

Clean plates, knives and forks, were set for them at places where people had finished eating. The tablecloth was not very clean, and the table was in great disorder. The dinner consisted principally of boiled beans, salt meat, potatoes, coffee, and leathery pie for dessert.

Our ladies did not admire the dinner, or the way it was served, very much. They would have turned from it in disgust in Jersey City; but their twenty-five miles ride over the prairies on a March day had made them ravenously hungry, and as there was none other obtainable, they made a virtue of necessity and ate a hearty dinner.

While they were eating, others were sitting about the room talking; some of the men went outside to smoke, and others traveled off on foot to examine the country. All seemed strangers to each other, hence all were on an equal footing, and that made them free to talk. They all seemed kind to one another, and perfectly willing to impart what little knowledge of the country they had. After dinner the Noble ladies went up stairs to their room, but they soon discovered that it was not theirs alone, for there were

three beds in it, and they were obliged to share it with other ladies.

Harry did not leave Plankinton until an hour after the stage had started. Then mounted on a lumber wagon, drawn by two old white mules, with his trunks behind him, he started for where he expected to locate his future home. He soon discovered that the driver, although roughly dressed, was a very pleasant young man, about twenty-three years old. He told Harry that he was a native of New York city, and had been a clerk in A. T. Stewart's store. Tiring of city life, and seeing no prospect of improving his condition, he made up his mind to try the West, and, very much against the will of his family, he started out.

"How have you made out?" Harry inquired.

"I am not rich yet, but I have earned three horses and a good wagon."

"Have you any land?"

"Yes, I have preempted a quarter section. I entered on it about two months ago. I am now working for the landlord at Land View to get money to pay two hundred dollars to the government at the end of the six months."

"Have you ever been sorry that you left your clerkship?"

"No; I never would have been any thing but a poor clerk if I had stayed in New York; here I can make something of myself."

"Do you think any young man can get along in Dakota?"

"Yes, if he is willing to work, and if he is not particular about what kind of work he does. If a man will only work here he can get along. If he wont work he can't; that's all there is about it. There's plenty of chances."

"Do you like Dakota?"

"Very much. I am strong, healthy, and independent here, and in a few months I shall own a farm of my own. It would take me a long time to do that in York State, wouldn't it?"

"It certainly would."

"You see," the driver continued, "the land law is very liberal. It allows a young man to spend part of his time off his claim, so that he is able to take up land and earn money to pay for it at the same time. I keep my horses on my claim, a neighbor tends to them, and I sleep there once in awhile. You see, it is not far from Land View."

About noon the driver stopped his wagon, unhitched his mules, and gave them some oats. Harry, in anticipation of a long day's ride over the prairie, had purchased some crackers and cheese at Plankinton. The driver spread an old buffalo robe which he had with him under the wagon, and they lunched together on the crackers and cheese.

The country through which they had thus far passed was all prairie; it seemed to be much broken

in places, and in other places quite stony. Here and there were claim shanties, generally with no one living in them. When Harry had called the driver's attention to an uninhabited one at first, he replied, laughing: "O, it's holdin' down a quarter section for some fellow."

On one of the stoniest and roughest parts of the road there was a settlement. Some of the houses were board shanties; others were sod-cabins, and others a conglomerated mixture of both. A little ground was plowed near each abode, and stones were gathered in small heaps in places.

"This is a settlement we're going through," the driver said.

"A mighty rough looking settlement," Harry replied. "What kind of people are they?"

"Don't know, foreigners of some kind; Russians, I guess. They've got the worst piece of land between Plankinton and Land View."

"I expect some land agent fooled them?" said Harry.

"Likely."

After lunch the driver hitched up his old white mules again, with the rather apologetic remark: "Them mules is not much for looks, but they'll draw as big a load and make as good time between Plankinton and Land View as the best-looking team that travels on the road."

About half past four o'clock in the afternoon the

driver remarked: "Pretty soon we'll be in Douglas County."

"How can you tell?" Harry inquired, for it all seemed prairie alike to him.

"There's a pile of sod piled up at the county line; there it is now—see, right over there," pointing with his whip to a small pile of sod. "You will see that the land will begin to improve now; it's better in Douglas County than the land through which we have been passing."

About six o'clock the white mules drew up at the Land View Hotel, and the trunks were ranged along the sides of the front room, crowding up that small place more than ever; but useful as seats for the guests.

Harry made his way up stairs, through the people sitting about the lower room, where he found his mother and the two young ladies seated on the only three chairs in the room. There were two small windows in the room, one at either end. The girls had an exceedingly woe-begone look, and Mrs. Noble was knitting a stocking with an air of constrained cheerfulness.

"O, Harry!" exclaimed Minnie, did you ever see such a horrid crowded little house, and just think, the landlady says that the house is so full that we must sleep two in a bed, so one of us must sleep with a strange woman."

"Never mind, dear," said Grace, soothingly. "You

can sleep with your mother, and I'll sleep with the landlady ; she seems a nice woman."

"And just to think, Harry, the landlady says the men must all sleep on the floor of the dining-room, or whatever you call it."

"Well, Min," said Harry, laughing at her dismay, "we're on the frontier of civilization now and cannot expect Jersey City accommodations ; you know how brave you were talking it all over before we started."

"Yes," Minnie answered, "but it's very different braving hardships sitting in a comfortable sitting-room."

"That's so ; but never mind, we'll pull through, Min."

CHAPTER VI.

A March day in a Dakota hotel—Hunting land—The young land agent—The whole family go land hunting—Riding over the prairie—Eureka—An estate of nearly one thousand acres—The beautiful lake.

IT was as Minnie had said. That night all the women slept in the beds up stairs, two in a bed, and the men on the floor of the dining-room down stairs. Soon after supper was over, and the dishes had been laid upon the table for breakfast by the servant-girl, the landlord brought an armful of dark-colored blankets, and, throwing them down on the floor, said, "There, boys, is your beds; whenever yer ready, ye can turn in."

Most of the men were very tired, having been out land hunting all day, and one after another they pulled off their boots and coats, and rolling the latter up for a pillow, laid down upon the hard floor, and soon were sound asleep, as their hard and steady breathing testified.

Very early in the morning the servant-girl came in from the kitchen into the dining-room, and the men were obliged to get up while she prepared breakfast and put it upon the table. There was a rude, unpainted wash-stand in the corner, provided with a wooden water-bucket, a tin dipper and wash-basin,

also a large coarse roller towel, at which each of the men washed in turn. Some of the men stood about the room; others sat upon the wooden chairs, and others looked out of the two small windows, one at either end of the room, while the servant prepared breakfast.

Breakfast was soon ready, and some of the women came down stairs and seated themselves at the table with the men, until it was filled. Breakfast was very much like supper—salt pork, cold boiled beans, bread, poor butter, and coffee. Fresh meat was a luxury seldom seen in Land View.

While the first company of guests were eating their breakfasts, the wind began to blow from the north-west; it became very cold, and some snow began to fall. After the first tableful had eaten their breakfast Mrs. Noble and the two young ladies came down the narrow creaking stairs, and with others helped fill the table again, the servant-girl and the driver of the lumber wagon taking seats among the others. When humanity is so crowded together social distinctions must vanish.

After breakfast the men began to bewail the weather, for most of them were hunting land, and the weather was too stormy to go out on that errand to-day; but one, a German, was determined to go out; he said he could not afford to lose the time, and, although warned that it was foolhardy, and even a dangerous thing to do, he put on a blue soldier's

overcoat and a warm cap that pulled down over his ears and started out. The other men sat around the sides of the room, with their chairs tipped back against the wall, and huddled around the small wood-stove in one corner and talked about the prospects of the country, where to find the best land, and subjects of that character, until noon. The dinner was put upon the table and gone through in a mechanical kind of way. After dinner one of the men took out a pack of cards and four of them began playing at one end of the table, and the landlord hunted up a rather dilapidated violin, and began to scrape "Money Musk," and tunes of that ilk, upon it. The weather outside had grown worse, the wind whistled through the weather-boards of the unplastered house, and up through the uncarpeted floors.

Up stairs the lady guests huddled around a small wood-stove in one corner, with their shawls on, only partially warm; some tried to read; some tried to knit; others talked of their families, why they had come to Dakota, and its prospect, which that day seemed blue enough to all; and some, I am afraid, were weak enough to cry, among whom was Minnie.

Just before supper-time a venturesome wagon drove up to the door; the driver called for some one to come out. Several men went out and found the German, who had started out in the morning to hunt land, sitting in the bottom of the wagon with his feet badly frozen. He was helped into the hotel, and the

doctor, who lived close by, sent for. The driver of the wagon said he had found him lying by the roadside scarcely able to move, and if he had not arrived when he did the German would soon have frozen to death.

After supper, of the routine bill of fare, the same arrangements were made for sleeping as the previous night.

The men who slept on the floor of Land View Hotel that night were a discouraged set of men, and the women who were huddled together in the beds up stairs were unhappy.

Outside the wind whistled and howled, shaking the poor, thin house and streaming in through numberless cracks. Altogether the first day of the Noble family in Douglas County was a gloomy, disappointing day. Toward morning the wind went down, the clouds disappeared, and then the sun arose bright, beautiful, and warm.

Breakfast was served early in the Land View Hotel, and the land hunters started out in different directions to hunt desirable claims.

When Mrs. Noble and the two young ladies came down stairs their faces looked more hopeful and pleasant than on the previous day. They found no one in the dining-room but Harry, who was waiting for them, and the poor German, whose feet were frozen yesterday.

"Harry, my son," said Mrs. Noble, kissing his

forehead when he came up to her, "we are not to have all stormy days in Dakota, are we?"

"I should hope not, mother!"

"I had almost begun to think we never would have a pleasant day in this country, for this is the first time the sun has shone since we have been in the Territory," said Minnie.

"And this is the third day we have been here, and the time March, the most blustering month of the year. I'll bet Min cried yesterday, and I'll leave it to Grace," said Harry, teasingly.

"Harry, you must not tease Minnie," said Grace, as she noticed Minnie's countenance fall at this haphazard taunt, which had hit the mark. "You may find that she is the heroine of the family before we get through with Dakota."

After breakfast Harry went out to make inquiries of the land agents, for he found there were several, even in this small place, about where and how to get the most desirable land. He found they were well supplied with land of all kinds for sale, either deeded lands, relinquishment of rights of men now settled on claims, or they would, for a reasonable fee, show him desirable claims of government lands yet untaken. They had maps from the land-office at Yanton, showing which claims were taken and which were vacant.

Harry found that, although he had studied "The American Settler's Guide," by Henry N. Copp, which

is recognized as authority on United States land matters, he could not locate quarter sections with any certainty, and would hence be dependent upon the assistance of the land agent.

He found one of the land agents, a young man about his own age, and a very pleasant man to meet. He first tried to sell him deeded land, then a relinquishment. This he did because he would make more money than by putting him on government land and simply getting a fee. Failing in this he told Harry he could put him on some first-class quarter sections, and if he would be ready he would hitch up his ponies and take him to see them in the afternoon.

After dinner they started, and Harry had his first ride over one of the great prairies of Dakota. How soul-expanding it is to traverse one of these immense prairies; the bright blue sky above, the rolling prairie in every direction, to breathe the pure, delicious air!

Their wagon was a buckboard, and their ponies two mustangs, young, and brown in color. They traveled in a quick, tireless trot over the prairies, and seemed as tough as mules. The land agent said he had purchased them only a few days before, and they were fresh from Texas. They were just off the plains, would not touch corn, and were just learning to eat oats.

At first they started on a pretty good road, but it

soon became two faint lines in the grass, and directly the land agent took a right angular departure from it right over the prairie. That is one advantage of prairie traveling; if you know your route, you can drive across the prairie in any direction, the ground being smooth and level, and there being no obstructions to the wheels but the yielding grass.

"Have you been long in this country?" inquired Harry.

"Since last summer."

"I suppose you have secured some desirable land?"

"Yes, I have a homestead, a preemption, and a tree claim, four hundred and eighty acres."

"You have improved your time,—what induced you to come to Dakota?"

"I was a school-teacher in Michigan; my health began to fail. I became consumptive, and reading about the sanitive properties of Dakota air, I determined to try it and to take up some land at the same time. When I came here there were very few settlers in the county. I took up a preemption claim, and a timber claim. I built a shanty on the preemption, and cultivated a few acres of ground. I also bought me a pony. I spent a great part of my time riding about. When I got tired I would lariat my pony and lie down on the prairie, and read or think—dream the time away. It was the most delightful period of my life. I came here almost a skeleton; now, you see, I am robust and healthy.

In my meanderings I became well acquainted with the lay of the country. By going into the land business I am making practical use of that knowledge. With the rush of immigration this spring I have even more business than I can attend to."

As they were driving along Harry noticed that there was only a claim shanty here and there, with a few acres broken near it. After a pleasant drive they arrived at the claims which the agents wished to show Harry.

"There," he said, "is a very fine claim. I will drive you around it."

He drove around and across it, and Harry found it quite a long drive; for a quarter section of land is a half-mile long on each side, making two miles around it, so that while quarter sections are spoken of very glibly, yet they make quite large farms.

The land agent showed him several more quarter sections, all of which Harry thought were very good, but told the agent that he would not decide upon them finally until his mother and sister had seen the land, since they were as much interested in it as he was and should be consulted. The land agent then said he would hitch up his ponies to a two-seated wagon the next morning, and they would all come out and inspect the land. They had a pleasant drive back to Land View, and arrived there just as the sun was sinking below the prairie horizon.

Minnie was standing at the hotel door as the buck-

board drove up. The land agent looked at her admiringly.

"O, Harry!" she exclaimed, running up to meet him, "have you found us each a farm?"

"I think so, Min."

"Come up stairs then, and tell us all about it; mother and Grace are waiting to hear."

"All right, come along! We'll soon be land-owners."

"Were you successful in your errand, Harry dear?" Mrs. Noble inquired, smiling upon him as he entered. She and Grace were sitting by the window, and had been anxiously watching for the return of the buckboard.

"I think I have been very successful, mother; but it is not to be decided until you and the girls go to see it to-morrow morning. The land agent, and, by the way, he is a very nice fellow, is coming around with a double-seated wagon for us all."

"Good, good!" cried Minnie, clapping her hands; "then we'll have our first ride over the prairie. Wont that be splendid?"

"Since you left, Harry," began Grace, "we've made the acquaintance of the pluckiest little school-marm I ever saw."

"Is she good-looking as well?" interrupted Harry, laughing.

"Not very good-looking, but bright, smart, and intelligent looking."

"Not pretty, but smart and plucky," said Harry, still laughing.

"Yes, that's it; now listen: she came here on horse-back, riding sideways on a man's saddle, all alone; dismounted, hitched her horse to a post, came in and inquired for the landlord, sent him for a land agent, told him to be in a hurry, she could not wait. When the landlord returned with the land agent she told him that she had come West to homestead a farm, and wanted him to show her a good one right away, as she must hurry back to a friend's house, where she was stopping. The land agent told her he had a relinquishment on a piece of land, three miles away, that he thought would suit her; she sent him to get his horse to go and see it with her right away; directly he came back with his horse, she mounted her man's saddle womanwise again, and away they went. In an hour they returned; she agreed to purchase the relinquishment of the claim owner for one hundred and fifty dollars; gave the land agent the money, told him to have the papers made out all right, that she would be back in three days and take possession. She mounted her horse again, waived her hand to the land agent and to us, who were watching her, and rode away on a fast gallop. What do you think of that for pluck and business dispatch in a young woman?"

"She's a rustler, as they say out here; a female rustler."

"And Harry," said Minnie, solemnly, "I asked

her if she wasn't afraid to go and live and sleep all alone in a little wood shanty away off from every body. She bristled up like an angry hen, and said, 'I afraid! not a bit of it. I came out here to get what the government gives to every man and unmarried woman of legal age—a homestead of my own, and I am going to have it. I am not a timid little coward (with a sneer); I am an independent, free woman, and no true man will molest me. They are true men that come here to brave frontier life, that they may have homes of their own for themselves and families, which they could not have in the overcrowded East.' ”

“I confess I felt like giving her three cheers as she rode away,” said the equable Mrs. Noble.

The next day proved a pleasant day also, the air was clear and bracing, the sky blue, the sun shone brightly. About eight o'clock the land agent drove up to the hotel with his ponies harnessed to a three-seated, open-top, spring wagon; so there was room for all. Minnie's seat was by the pleasant young land agent. She found him so agreeable that she chatted with him all the way. The days spent thus far in Dakota had been most trying to Mrs. Noble, whose health was not robust, but the clear, pure, bracing air of this morning brought the color to her cheeks as well as to those of the young people, and the sparkle to her eyes as well as theirs.

“I really begin to think there is something invig-

orating in the much-praised Dakota air after all!" she exclaimed, after they had been riding over the prairie about an hour, "for, notwithstanding the inconveniences and discomforts of the last few days, I begin to feel almost young again."

"Its effects are wonderful, as I myself am a living witness, ma'am," the land agent answered.

"Do you not think, sir, that it is because people live more in the open air that they are benefited by it?" Mrs. Noble replied.

"I've no doubt but that has much to do with it, but that is not all; there appears to be an exhilarating property in the air itself. Some claim an extra quantity of ozone in it, and others say that as we get the north and west winds before they pass over the more thickly settled country east and south of us, they are not used up—that is, their life-giving properties are unvitiated by life-destroying gases," the land agent replied.

"The theory seems plausible," Mrs. Noble answered.

In driving over the prairie Mrs. Noble observed that it was composed of small basins or valleys, many of which had a small lake in the center. These lakes were covered with wild fowl. There was but little running water, they having passed over but one small creek in their ride. She called Harry's attention to this fact, and suggested that it would be a good plan to try and get one of those little lakes on their claims.

Harry inquired of the land agent if he did not know of a lake that might be secured in that way.

The land agent, who had become quite interested in the family, and was greatly pleased with the young ladies, had determined that it would not be for lack of inducements that he was able to offer if they did not settle in Douglas County.

"There is none on the claims I showed you yesterday," he replied; "but as we are near them now, I will show them to the ladies, and at the same time try and think of a lake for you. There is the pile of sod that is the first mark of the claims I showed Mr. Noble yesterday; now we will drive over them."

The ponies trotted briskly along through the dried grass. The claim hunters expressed themselves greatly pleased with the land and the views.

"You have what you want here," the land agent said, "all but the lake. I have thought of a section of land adjoining some of this land which has a beautiful lake in the center. Now, I advise that you take that section and two of these quarter sections, which will make six quarter sections, or nine hundred and sixty acres of land."

Harry gave a long whistle, and exclaimed,

"Just think of it, mother, nearly one thousand acres of this magnificent land in the family!"

"It seems a princely domain," Minnie extravagantly remarked.

"I am sorry, Grace dear," said Mrs. Noble, "that

you are not just a little older, that you might take up land alongside of ours."

"Now I will drive to the lake," said the land agent.

After a short drive they arrived on top of a hill and looked down on a most charming winding lake, about half a mile long. The ladies clapped their hands with delight. Harry seemed pleased beyond expression.

"It is the promised land!" Grace exclaimed.

"Do you see that promontory jutting into the lake over there," said Harry; "it is a most beautiful site for a house; will you please drive over there?"

"Certainly."

It was a charming place for a house. The hill gently sloped down to the lake, which would furnish hunting, rowing, and skating, as well as ice for the summer.

They were all greatly delighted, and more so as they examined the land and the lake.

"We have found it at last!" cried Harry; "we will seek no farther."

It was a pleasant ride home. They had found what they had come so far to seek. Beautiful visions arose in their minds of delightful prairie homes, of vine-clad cottages, fields of waving grain, flocks of lowing cattle, and herds of bleating sheep. The hearts of the young people were very light, and with laugh, joke, and song, the happy party sped along

behind the lively little mustangs. A serene smile was on Mrs. Noble's face. The land agent thought it the happiest land-hunting party he had ever directed. Well might they be happy in the midst of hardships, and forget them, too, in prospect of such a glorious prairie home.

CHAPTER VII.

Preempting land and taking up tree claims—Building houses—Nobleton—Buying a team—Erecting the family altar—Attending church—Journey to Yankton, United States Land-office—Oak Hollow Rancho—Wash Huntbiz—Scotland—Yankton—The United States Land-office.

THE land agent advised Harry and his family the next day to preempt a quarter section each, and to take up a tree claim each ; by doing so they would still each hold in reserve the right to take a homestead ; such is the liberality of the United States' land laws at the present time. It would also make a trip to Yankton, to the United States Land-office, unnecessary until nearly the first of May, by which time, it was reasonable to expect, that the weather would be pleasanter. The law requires settlement to be made on land before it is entered, when it is preempted ; but where a homestead is taken, it is necessary to visit the land-office first and make entry of the land. The entry of a tree claim may be made in person or by attorney ; it is generally done by attorney. They decided to follow the agent's advice. Harry now found himself busy, not with routine office work, but important work, which required the active use of his reasoning and executive abilities. The nine hundred and sixty acres which they had selected were to be

secured at once, or else some of the numerous land hunters in the county would make entry on them before he did, and he would be obliged to go on another land hunt, which might not result in securing such desirable claims. He accordingly authorized the land agent to draw up the necessary papers for Mrs. Noble, Minnie, and himself, to secure the tree claims, and send them by mail to his corresponding attorney at Yankton; that would secure the tree claims. The next step was to build some kind of habitations on the preemption claims, and to move into them, thus "making settlement," and securing them. It might have been within the letter of the law for them to have built houses on the claims, and have held them without moving in at once; but the little hotel was so crowded, and privacy of any kind so unattainable, that all the Noble family were willing to move into exceedingly small houses, that they might be by themselves again.

In the crowded little hostelry Harry had become acquainted with Mr. Joseph Brown, who exercised the calling of carpenter and builder. He had been a school-teacher at home, and had come to Dakota to secure a homestead. But unfortunately becoming involved in a contest with another claimant for the same quarter section, he could not proceed with the settlement until the contest was decided by the government, which might not occur for several weeks or months. In the meantime he built claim shanties for settlers.

He had never learned the trade of carpenter, but being handy with the saw, chisel, and hammer, and having a Yankee's adaptation for any kind of work, he could do the necessary work required by the settlers very well, and not only built houses, but also made part of the furniture for them.

After dinner that day Harry took Joe Brown outside of the hotel, for there was no privacy obtainable in the hotel, all conversations, excepting those carried on in whispers, being plainly audible all over it. Harry said to him,

"Mr. Brown, my mother, my sister, and myself have selected three quarter sections for preemption, and will want three claim shanties built at once."

"I'm your man," Joe Brown answered, quickly; "I'll take the contract."

"What will they cost?"

"Depends on what kind of a house you want — can build you a twenty-five, fifty, or hundred dollar house."

"What kind of a house is a twenty-five dollar house?"

"Well, that is a small house."

"And a hundred dollar house?"

"Good sized house; two rooms."

Then followed a conversation as to the exact sizes, in feet, in quality of lumber, etc., after which Harry called out his mother and the girls, and quite a lengthy discussion with Joe Brown resulted in the following decision: Three houses were to be built,

a hundred dollar house, which would be Mrs. Noble's residence; and two twenty-five dollar houses, one of which would be Harry's residence, and the other Minnie's. They were to be built where the boundary lines of the three quarter sections cornered together, and would be only a few feet apart. Mrs. Noble's house would be the rendezvous, and Grace would share it with her.

"Hurrah for Nobleton!" cried Harry, throwing up his hat after the arrangements had agreed upon; and Joe Brown had contracted to begin hauling lumber that afternoon, and to begin building the next morning.

"I think we ought to call it Gracetown," said Minnie.

"Because I have no claim there," said Grace.

"We might call it Minnie-ha-ha," said Harry, laughing.

"No, sir," said Minnie; "you laugh enough at me already, without incorporating a laugh at me into the name of our new settlement; and besides that, Long-fellow, and not I, would get the glory of the name."

Joe Brown immediately bought a load of lumber, hired a team, and in an hour he and Harry were seated upon the lumber, and traveling slowly on their way to the claims. Joe Brown admired the land and location very much when he arrived there, but lost no time in beginning the erection of one of the claim shanties, Harry gladly helping him. In the

meantime, Mrs. Noble and the young ladies, after consultation with the landlady, who kindly volunteered all the advice and assistance in her power, engaged the white mule team to go to Plankinton on the morrow to bring down what little furniture they needed for their prairie housekeeping, and gave the driver a list of the things wanted. The Land View stores were not prepared to furnish much beyond bare necessities, hence it was necessary to import many things. Mrs. Noble had brought very few things with her from the East, excepting clothing, and found that she had done wisely, for she found that goods could be bought at exceedingly moderate prices at Mitchell and Plankinton, so that it was a positive economy to sell her household goods in the East, and buy new ones in the West, rather than to pay high freight rates on her old goods. Grace brought a small melodeon. After making out the list, Mrs. Noble and the young ladies went up stairs. Taking a seat at the window, Mrs. Noble remarked :

“My dear girls, you observe that, notwithstanding the exceedingly uncomfortable circumstances in which we are placed, compared with the home we have left, yet we are all in a cheerful state of mind, which would have seemed impossible to us in the misery of the stormy day after our arrival here.”

“Well, the weather is so much better since then, and we have found our claims,” Minnie said, putting her arms around her mother and kissing her.

"Yes, my child," said Mrs. Noble, returning the kiss, with a loving look in her eyes, "these things have had much to do with the change in our spirits. In securing the land we have realized the main object of our journey, and although there are, doubtless, hardships and inconveniences in store for us, yet I hope we shall be able to meet them with cheerful spirits, because the general outlook of our affairs has improved so much."

"Have you noticed, auntie," said Grace, "how much Harry's looks have improved since we arrived West, and he has been looking after the family affairs. That dull, broken-spirited look which he used to wear when he came home in the evening to Jersey City has left him now that he moves about a man among men."

"Could a mother's eyes help notice the change, dear Grace?" replied Mrs. Noble. "It makes my heart glad to see my boy put on the man again, and I feel I have not made a mistake in coming to Dakota; the hardships which we must bear will be more than compensated for by the improvement of our health, and the sense of true manly and womanly independence which we shall acquire in endeavoring to become the masters of our own fortunes."

The next day when Harry returned to the hotel in the evening, with Joe Brown, he announced to Minnie, with mock gravity,

"Miss Noble, I have the great pleasure to announce

to you that your residence, so recently begun as yesterday, has been completed to-day, and may now be occupied at such time as suits your ladyship's convenience and pleasure."

"But I'm not going to live out there till the others do!" Minnie exclaimed, with rather a frightened look in her face.

"The young ladies in Dakota go out on their claims and live alone; don't they, Mr. Brown?" said Harry, winking at him.

"Quit teasing Minnie," said Grace, "there is no necessity of her moving out there until we go; is there, auntie?"

"No, dear, certainly not," said Mrs. Noble; "why do you torment Minnie so, Harry?" reprovingly.

"I wanted to see if Min was as brave as that school-marm who was here the other day, mother."

"If I was obliged to do so," Minnie replied, rather soberly; "I think I could live on a claim alone; but since I have a great, big brother, over six feet, [sarcastically,] I don't think it necessary."

"I am inclined to think," said Harry, laughing, "that it is not the tenderly raised young ladies that are taking up the claims, and living alone on them, but the school-teachers and shop girls who are more self-reliant and accustomed to care for themselves."

On the evening of the next day Harry made the announcement when he returned that his house was finished. "We are to begin on your mansion to-

morrow, mother," he said, "because that is so much larger we have left is until the last, and the lumber had not all arrived for it."

The weather for a couple of days had been cold and blustering. The white mule team had returned from Plankinton with the goods ordered, and with Grace's melodeon; they had been taken to the claims and were stored in Minnie's shanty until the family moved on the claims.

It took Joe Brown two weeks to build Mrs. Noble's house, and he was obliged to hire another carpenter to help him.

It was the early part of April when they moved out on their claims; the weather was still cold for the season, but not so unsettled and blustering as March. The houses were built facing the south. Harry occupied the middle one, so that he would be within close call of either of the other houses.

They chose a pleasant day to move to the claims; the houses were built on a little knoll.

"Why," exclaimed Minnie, when they first came within sight of them, "Nobleton looks like a little village."

"All that it needs to make it one is a blacksmith shop and a store," said Harry.

When they dismounted from the white mule wagon, Minnie ran into her shanty, the remainder of the family following her to the door. "O!" she exclaimed, throwing up her hands and a look of dis-

gust passing over her face, "Is this my house? Why, we would not think it good enough for a wash-house in Jersey City."

"No!" Harry replied, laughing; "it would hardly be considered fit for a good coal-shed there."

The faces of the other ladies also had a dismayed look, but they did not express it in speech.

Mrs. Noble said: "Minnie, remember, dear, we are in Dakota now, and not in Jersey City."

"Just look at the windows," said Grace, smilingly, "only two, with four small panes of glass in each."

"It's better to look out of them on your own land than to be a clerk and look out of Stewart's plate-glass windows on Broadway," said the driver, who was standing behind the family.

From Minnie's shanty they went to Harry's, which was as like it as two peas in a pod, then to Mrs. Noble's house; this was a tiny two-roomed, one-story cottage.

"When this is fixed up and painted a little, and has a few flowers and vines about it, I do not think it will look so badly," said Grace.

"No, indeed!" said Harry, "we will make mother's and your house a cozy little home, and Min and I will be your constant visitors."

There was not much time given to talking, as there was much work to do. First Harry put up the small wood cook-stove in the room in his mother's house,

which was to be the common kitchen and dining-room, and made a fire in it.

Joe Brown had made a small cupboard for their dishes and a table of planed pine boards. In the inner room he had made a rude wardrobe of the same material.

The young ladies unpacked the few dishes and were going to wash them.

"O! we have got no water," exclaimed Minnie.

"We'll have to get our water from the lake until we can get a well dug. I'll go and get some now," said Harry.

"We will want more than you can carry, Harry," said Grace, "I will go with you and help you, and learn the nearest way."

With two new, bright tin buckets each, Grace and Harry started over the brown prairie, on that bright, cool April day, for water from the lake. It was the first time they had been alone since they left Jersey City; they started out in haste for the lake, but as they walked side by side over the prairie in the bright April sunlight their steps unconsciously grew slower; they did not converse much, and what they said was on the most practical subjects of their new life, yet there was evidently a congeniality in their companionship, not expressed in words, yet evident in Harry's satisfied expression of countenance, as well as the gentle, placid look on Grace's face, in the unconscious drooping of her large, liquid blue eyes, and

the heightened pink on her cheek. Thus they slowly walked down the knoll and a short distance over the prairie to the edge of the lake, frightening a lot of wild ducks as they came to the edge, so that they swam rapidly away ; the ducks were not yet enough afraid of mankind to fly from them. At this point on the edge of the lake Harry had thrown some large stones, a little out beyond the edge, for stepping-stones, that water might be taken from a deeper place than along the shallow shore. He stepped out on these stones, stooped his splendid figure, filled the bright bucket, and handed it to Grace, then filled his other bucket, and handed it to her ; she then handed him her buckets, and he filled them in the same way. They laughed gleefully while they did it, and wondered what their city friends would say if they saw them now ; they unconsciously seemed to enjoy helping each other doing the same work. Their buckets filled, they started slowly back again, very slowly up the knoll, for Grace's muscles were not very well developed yet ; arrived at the top of the knoll, Grace remembered that they had been very slow in doing their errand, so, with hurried footsteps, she completed it, with Harry hurrying by her side. Minnie came to the door to look for them just as they arrived.

"I should think it was a couple of miles down to the lake, Harry," she said, with a laughing frown, "judging from the time it took you and Grace to go after that water."

"Were we so very slow, dear? We'll try and do better next time; it is our first trip, you know," Grace replied, repentantly. For once the quick-tongued Harry had no retort to make.

Minnie filled the tea-kettle full of water, so as to have hot water to wash the dishes, and then helped her mother and Grace get the goods in order in the house.

Harry went over to the shanties and put up a camp-bed in each, and a small sheet-iron hay-stove, for it was too early in the season to do without fires, and hay was a convenient, abundant, and cheap fuel.

The shanties were so small that Mrs. Noble thought that they could afford to have carpet on the floors, it would give them so much more a comfortable and home-like look; so she purchased carpets for them, as well as the inner room of her house—neat and pretty ingrain carpet, with bright colors. Harry had just finished putting up the hay-stove in his shanty when Minnie came to the door.

"What have you been doing, Harry?" she inquired.

"I have just finished putting up your bed and mine, and the two hay-stoves."

She sat down on the door-step and began laughing heartily.

"What are you laughing about, Min?" He wiped the perspiration from his brow, for he had just

achieved a hard-won victory over the stove-pipe in putting it together and putting it up.

"O, you goose! don't you see what's the matter?"

"No, I don't see any thing wrong," looking around.

"Why, don't you see you've put the bed and stove up before you've put the carpet down."

Harry gave a long whistle, and sat down on the side of the bed.

"Have to take the beds and stoves down again," at last he said, ruefully. "No, I'll take the beds down, but not the stoves; I'll slip the carpet under the stoves; I'm not going to tackle those stove-pipes again."

"I came over to tell you that dinner is ready," Minnie said; "so don't go to pounding your fingers with the hammer tacking the carpet down until you dispose of that." She put her arm through his as he came to the door, and together they walked into Mrs. Noble's house and seated themselves at the table, at which Mrs. Noble and Grace were already seated. They all bowed their heads, and Harry asked the blessing of God upon their first meal upon their land. It was a very plain meal, only fried ham, boiled potatoes, bread and butter, and coffee without cream or milk; but every thing was neat and clean; white table-cloth and white dishes; and there were free and happy hearts around the table, so it was a feast. Better far such a dinner than one of the rich-

est viands with a board surrounded by discontented minds and unhappy hearts.

After dinner Harry went back to the shanties and put the carpets down, and put up a row of hooks in each to hang clothing on. Then he went to his mother's house and found that they had put the carpet down in the inner room, and he put up their camp-beds. He also brought in Grace's melodeon and placed it where she desired it in the room. Thus in preparing their houses the afternoon sped quickly away, and at tea-time they gathered around their frugal board again. Supper over, the dishes washed and placed upon the shelves, the lamp was lit and placed upon the table, and they gathered about it and talked cheerfully of their day's work and good prospects. The night was clear and quite cool; it was star-light, the pure air blew gently. That lone light shone brightly through the little window across the billowy prairie. Would that it might shine as a beacon into crowded city streets, into noisome cellars, and crowded attic rooms with fetid air, and point the denizens to the free lands and pure air of the prairies!

About nine o'clock Mrs. Noble got the family Bible out of her trunk, laid it upon the table, adjusted her spectacles, and read the Twenty-third Psalm; then they all kneeled down and invoked God's blessing and protecting care. The blessed Saviour, who knoweth his sheep and careth for them, sent into their hearts, on that lonely prairie, a sense of his pro-

tecting presence ; so they felt as safe as when at home they had been protected by all the modern appliances of civilization. Thus they erected the family altar in their new home.

Directly after the prayer Harry lighted two small lanterns, which had been purchased for the purpose, and, kissing his mother good-night, escorted Minnie to her shanty. She took one of the lanterns, entered and locked the door ; then Harry returned to his shanty.

For a short time three lights twinkled through the little windows across the prairie, then one after another went out into the darkness.

There was a sense of strangeness at first to them all, at sleeping afar off on the prairie, but all sense of fear had fled, and, as they were all tired, they were soon all sleeping sweetly. "And underneath are the everlasting arms."

The next morning, after breakfast, Harry began the erection of a small stable ; for he found that it would be necessary to purchase a pair of horses, a wagon, and a plow.

The ladies continued the work of unpacking their goods and getting them in order.

It took Harry that day and the next to finish the stable, for he was not very expert at carpenter work. On the next day he walked to Land View to purchase a team and wagon. He succeeded there in purchasing, at a moderate price, a big, strong pair of black

horses, with harness, and a new wagon, the box of which was painted green and the wheels red. He also purchased some oats for the horses, and at one of the stores some groceries that his mother had ordered. This was Saturday. The landlord told him that there would be preaching to-morrow, and he had better bring up the ladies.

Harry felt proud of his big black team and gayly painted wagon, as he drove over the prairies to Nobleton, and long before he arrived there, he could see the ladies standing by his mother's house awaiting his return. He drove up to the houses in good style. The ladies expressed admiration for his purchase.

Harry had but little experience previously with horses, was rather awkward about harnessing them and taking care of them ; but the willing soon learn, and, if he did make a good many mistakes at first, he soon learned to take care of the horses and to drive them properly.

The spring was unusually late this year, and it was not until the latter part of April that the frost was all out of the ground, consequently farming operations were greatly delayed. Harry had no hay for his horses, but he lariatied them on the prairie, and he found that the brown, dried, last season's grass proved sufficient food for them, with the addition of a few oats. Cattle will live and do well on the grass without grain.

As the ground was not yet in proper condition to

begin farming work, Harry helped the ladies adorn the houses and make them as comfortable as possible. For the outside he bought paint of bright scarlet color, as a contrast to the green of the prairies, and painted them himself. The walls inside they covered with wall-paper, and hung up the few pictures they had brought with them. Grace made pretty white curtains for the windows, and Harry made several corner shelves and brackets on the sides of the room, of planed boards, the material of which the ladies deftly concealed with pretty hangings of gay chintzes. When completed, the houses had a cozy and comfortable look within, which one would have thought could hardly be attained with such rude materials and with so little expense. But we must go backward a little, to describe the first Sunday service which they attended. When Harry came home with his newly-purchased team he told the ladies that there would be religious services at Land View next day (Sunday). They all expressed a wish to take their first ride behind the new horses in the new wagon to attend church. Next morning, about nine o'clock, Harry drove the blacks up to his mother's door and helped the ladies into the wagon. He had purchased an extra seat, so that there would be seats for all on trips of this kind. Grace sat beside him, and Minnie and her mother on the back seat.

It was not quite ten o'clock when they drove up to the hotel. Harry helped the ladies out of the wagon,

took the horses to the stable, and returned to the hotel. The landlord said service did not begin until eleven o'clock, and the preacher had not yet arrived.

About half past ten o'clock the preacher arrived, having walked from his claim, several miles away. He was a thin, dolorous-looking man, with a whine in his voice. He said that service would be held in a new store, not quite completed, a few yards away. There was no church building or even school-house yet in Land View.

A few minutes before eleven o'clock the preacher requested the landlady to lend him her dinner bell, which she did ; it was a large brass hand-bell of the kind commonly used. Taking this in his hand he walked to the new store building and rang it vigorously in front to call the worshipers together. In a short time about thirty people assembled, men, women, and children. The seats were common boards laid on boxes, barrels, or any thing convenient ; there was a pile of shavings in one part of the room, which had been swept aside to make place for the worshipers, and a carpenter's table stood in the back part of the room. The worshipers were not the kind you would have expected to see on the frontier, men and women clad in clean, but rough and uncouth, home-made garments ; but they were intelligent and educated looking people, clad in comfortable, and some in even handsome, apparel, made in the prevailing styles of the East ; such people as you would have expected to

have seen in the large and prosperous towns of the East, but would be surprised to meet with in this rude village of a day in the far West.

The minister gave out a hymn, one of the brethren started the tune, a familiar hymn and tune, and the worshipers joined in the singing heartily; then he offered up an earnest prayer, after which there was another hymn; then a short sermon, not very excellent, but as the people there had come in the spirit of reverence and worship, and were not critical, they listened intently; it was followed by a short prayer, and the service was concluded with a familiar hymn, and the benediction.

After the service the people tarried, and mingled together, there was much hand-shaking, and many inquiries about, "How are you getting along on your claim?" and friendly questions of that kind. Strangers were introduced and received with kindly greetings. The landlady, who had accompanied the Noble family and was acquainted with many of the settlers, introduced them, and they received many kind words of welcome from those who had not been in the country many more weeks than themselves.

After church they walked back to the hotel and took dinner there, the landlord and landlady treating them like old friends. The little hotel was still in the same crowded condition, but the faces were nearly all new. Those who had been there when the Nobles were there had either settled on claims, or left the

country. There was a pile of lumber lying on the outside. The landlord told Harry he was going to build an addition to his house, four rooms, two up and two down stairs; business was so brisk that he could not accommodate all the travelers. Harry agreed with him that it was a much-needed improvement. After dinner the Nobles got into their wagon and drove back over the prairie to their claims.

When they arrived in sight of their houses Grace said: "I never thought I should feel as though I were going home when I traveled toward those extremely modest buildings over there on the knoll, but I must say I do feel that way now."

"Our homes, dear Grace, are where we are accustomed to meet and associate with our dear ones, be it a claim shanty on the Dakota prairie, or a marble palace on Fifth Avenue, New York," said Mrs. Noble.

"Well! this house seems quite commodious and palatial, after that little crowded hotel," exclaimed Minnie, as they entered her mother's house.

"You will observe, dear," said Mrs. Noble, as she sat down in a comfortable chintz-covered rocking-chair, and Grace affectionately took off her bonnet and shawl, "as you grow older, that we are greatly affected all through our lives by comparisons, much more, doubtless, than we ought to be; it must spring from a discontented mind. He was a wise man who said, 'Comparisons are odious.' A young lady is delighted with a new velvet coat until her friend gets a

zeal-skin, then she feels that she has descended in the scale of fashion by comparison. Her coat, it is true, is just as beautiful as ever, but she is unhappy. So a man living in a two-story house feels as important as his neighbor, but when the neighbor adds another story, the comparison affects his personal pride and he becomes unhappy. Such people are likely to become envious, and then covetous, which is breaking the tenth commandment."

"This is a good little sermon, mother," said Harry, "and I believe you are perfectly right."

After tea they gathered about the melodeon, and Grace played hymns, which they all joined in singing.

"I don't think living on the prairie is going to be so bad, after all," said Minnie, as Harry escorted her to her shanty to retire for the night.

When they had their houses all arranged they held a family consultation, in which it was decided that, since the ground was not in condition to plow yet, it would be better to make their trip to Yankton and make entry on their land, so that Harry would not be interrupted in his work after he was able to begin plowing. It was now the latter part of April, and the season still so late that the grass had not yet made its appearance on the prairie. On Tuesday morning they all started in the wagon, for they all had claims to enter, but Grace, and she did not wish to be left alone; so they locked up their residences, put the keys in their pockets, and started.

"It's an honest country," Harry said ; " no one will disturb our goods while we are away ; it is safer in that respect than Jersey City, for there is too much hard work in prospect here to make the country enticing to tramps or thieves."

It was a journey of nearly seventy miles to Yankton, the capital of the Territory, and seat of the land-office for that district. They were to travel about twenty-five miles that day, and stay all night at a cattle ranch in Oak Hollow. The next day they must rise early and travel all day.

They traveled for several miles over a rolling prairie ; then they rode over a flat prairie for about ten miles, on which the land was gravelly and poor. Here they passed through the town of Maitland, which was composed of one store, standing lonesome on the prairie, but there were settled claims in the neighborhood, and it was also the post-office. After passing over this poor land the road took them on to a richer prairie, but still very flat ; here were evidences of much longer settlement, for some of the farms had quite a cultivated appearance, and the houses were better.

As they approached Oak Hollow the prairie became more broken, and when they arrived there they found it was a deep ravine, through which flowed a creek ; on the banks of the creek and the sides of the ravine were a few scrub-oaks, the first native trees they had seen in Douglas County. This small creek

is the boundary between Douglas and Hutchinson Counties.

"Now we'll see what kind of a place a Dakota cattle ranch is," Harry said, as they drove down into Oak Hollow. The head-quarters of the ranch had probably been made in this ravine on account of its nearness to the creek for watering purposes, and because the hill-sides afforded a natural protection to the cattle from the storms. The road into Oak Hollow was rather steep and winding; Harry was obliged to put the brake on his wheels as he drove down.

The first thing that attracted their attention was a two-story stone house; the stones in the house were dark colored, rough shaped, and unevenly imbedded in mortar, which, jagged and uneven, unsmoothed by trowel, projected between the stones. It was built close against the hill-side, the rear of the first story pressing against the hill, and the second rising above the hill. The entrance was a door level with the ground, on the first story; it was in the center of the house, on either side was a window; there were two windows, in front, on the second story. A few steps from the house was a stone spring-house. In front of the house was a level space, on the other side of the house was the *corral*, with fence of wooden rails for the cattle. The road ran between the house and a large barn, on one side of which was a large corn-crib. Not far from the barn was a small space fenced in, on the bank of the creek, in which were kept the

pigs; there were about one hundred black Berkshire pigs in it. In front of the barn, and not far from it, was a patent mill, round, and something like a coffee-mill, with a go-around to it, for the purpose of grinding up coarse food for the stock. Two pretty, blonde, flaxen, curly-haired, rosy-cheeked children were playing with a couple of tubs in front of the house as the Noble family drove up. A young man, with much-worn, coarse felt hat, the brim flapping in his eyes, coarse, short jacket, check shirt, and coarse, faded, gray pants pushed into coarse, raw-hide boots, came out of the barn to receive them. His face was not so coarse and rough looking as his dress, and he inquired of the family very politely if they would not alight.

"Yes, if we can stay all night," Harry answered.

"O, yes, we keep travelers overnight."

The young man began to unharness the team, and Harry and the ladies descended from the wagon and walked up to the house, disturbing a number of chickens that were scratching about in front of the barn. The children stopped in their play and smiled at them as they passed, and Mrs. Noble spoke kindly to them. Harry knocked at the door, and it was immediately opened by a fine-looking woman, with flaxen, curly hair, evidently the mother of the children; she was dressed in a light-colored calico, very much soiled.

"Can we stay here to-night?" Harry inquired.

"Yes, walk in," she answered, briskly.

They entered a narrow hall, on either side of which was a room, the only rooms on that floor; the second floor also had two rooms; there were only four rooms in the house and attic. From the hall she led them into a long, dingy room, with two deep windows in it, one on the side, and the other in front. This room served as kitchen, dining-room, and, indeed, for every purpose but sleeping. There was no carpet on the floor, and it was very dirty; there was a cook-stove on one side of the room, a long table in the rear, and an old-fashioned dresser, with glass doors, in one of the front corners; these things, with a few rickety wooden chairs, were the entire furniture. Every thing had a much-used look, and disorder and dirt reigned supreme; the windows were opaque with dirt.

The woman was the wife of the ranchman; she was a smart woman, and did a great deal of work; but there was so much for her to do that it seemed to have overwhelmed her. The family consisted of herself, husband, two children, and four or five men who herded cattle and worked on the ranch. She took care of the children—what little care they received—did the cooking, baking, washing, and ironing, housework, and, beside this, took charge of the milk of about thirty cows, and made butter and cheese. Her house was also a post-office, and she post-mistress. She invited the ladies to lay off their

things, and then began moving around rapidly, making preparations for supper, first putting wood in the cook-stove and starting a brisk fire.

Harry went out to the barn in a few minutes to see that his horses had been properly cared for. He found that the young man had given them proper attention, and was sitting on an upturned wagon-box whistling and whittling. He seemed inclined to converse. He said he came from one of the eastern States, and had a good comfortable home back East, and that his father was well off, but he wanted to have a taste of western life, and had come out here, and was giving life on a ranch a trial.

"This is only a small ranch though," he said.

"How many cattle is there on this ranch?" Harry inquired.

"Only about three hundred; we had three hundred and seventy-five last fall, but the hard winter killed seventy-five."

"Had you no sheds for them?"

"No; the owner thinks it don't pay to build sheds, but I do, though; why, the cattle that he lost would pay for the sheds three times over."

"The cattle are not in yet?"

"No, the cowboys are out on the prairie with them; they'll be here directly."

"You have a fine lot of pigs over there."

"Yes, pigs do well here; fact is, every thing does well here, if you take care of them right. We let

them run out of the piggery a little while every afternoon; it does them good. Am going to let them out now. Want to see?"

Harry acquiesced, and they walked over to the piggery. The young man opened a gate and the pigs rushed and scrambled out and ran through the grass, seeming to enjoy their liberty like children a holiday. After letting them enjoy themselves for about half an hour the young man went into the barn and came out with a measure of corn; he gave a peculiar call which the pigs seemed to understand, for they all came running eagerly toward him, and he threw the corn on the ground in handfuls for them to eat. After they had eaten it all he drove them back into the piggery again. Then the young man called the chickens and fed them with corn.

"The boys ought soon to be in with the cattle; it must be half past six o'clock now," he said.

Harry heard the grinding of a brake on wheels, and looking toward the road he saw the stage coming; it was the same stage which brought the Noble ladies from Plankinton to Land View. This was the end of the mail route, and here stage and passengers were obliged to remain until next morning; then the stage returned, and passengers going farther south took another mail wagon, which also was obliged to remain here overnight. The stage drew up at the barn; there was only one passenger, a small dapper, fashionably dressed young man, a Chicago drummer. He

had two large sample trunks stowed away in the rear of the stage; they were so big it was a wonder that the stage held them. The driver told him he had better leave his trunks in the stage until morning, and then they could easily be transferred to the other stage. "They will be perfectly safe out here," the driver said. The drummer did not seem inclined to do so, but the driver said he would pull the curtains of the stage down and they would be perfectly safe." At least he consented, and, taking his grip in his hand, walked toward the house, using language as he went which was not at all complimentary to the country nor creditable to himself.

At this time another mail stage, which was simply a very light-bodied, black-colored spring wagon, drawn by two very wild-looking mustangs, driven by a big, overgrown boy, drove up from the opposite direction. There were no passengers. The two drivers said "How d'ye do?" to each other, and proceeded to unharness their horses and to put them in the barn.

Harry now noticed a great noise in the distance, evidently coming toward the barn; the tramping of many hooved feet, bellowing, a loud, sharp cracking of whips, and the voices of men hallooing. It was the herd coming home; these dissonant, mingled sounds increased in violence until the cattle reached the *corral*, into which, with much yelling and cracking of whips, the cowboys drove them, driving the

milking cows and the cows with calves into a separate place, separated from the main part by a fence. After the cattle were driven in, the cowboys rode their horses to the barn, dismounted, and took them in; then they went to the house, got buckets and a large wooden tub, and went back to the *corral* and milked the cows. When a bucket was full they would pour the milk into the tub, until they had at last a tub full of milk, which two of them carried to the house.

Harry went to the *corral* to see the cattle and to watch the boys milk; he was struck by the lean and poor condition of the cattle, and concluded that the young man's criticism of the ranch-owner's methods was just; although he pursued the usual methods of the country. The ways of a new country are generally the most crude and expensive; often on account of the poverty of the settlers, but very often for want of foresight, as in this case the ranchman could have sold enough cattle to have built sheds, and the protection thus given his herd would have saved the lives of more cattle than would have paid for the fence the first year.

Harry followed the cowboys to the house with the tub of milk. They set it down outside by the door. There was a tin wash-basin on a box on the other side, and a bucket of water with a dipper in it. This was the general washing place. The general wiping place was a long, coarse, crash towel on a roller behind the kitchen door; and the combing place a small, cracked,

dingy looking glass beside it, on the top of which was part of a coarse horn comb.

When Harry went into the house he found the ladies sitting on one side of the room, with an extremely disgusted look on their faces. The ranchwoman had a couple of mail-bags in front of her and was kneeling on the floor making up the mail for next morning. A couple of women from neighboring claims had come in to see if there were any letters for them, and were having a little gossip with her. After she had the mail fixed to her satisfaction, she closed the mail-bags, run the long leather straps through the bright buckles, closed the locks with a snap, and threw them into a corner. The neighboring women went out. The landlady now bustled about and put supper on the table, for she had it already cooked, and was only waiting for the men to come home to dish it up. When it was on the table she said, "Supper's ready," and there was a general move to the table, each selecting his own seat, cowboys, stage-drivers, the drummer, and the Noble family, all at the same table. The cowboys wore check shirts and ate in their shirt sleeves. Harry felt sorry for his mother and the girls, who had never faced life in such rough phase as this, but he could do nothing to help matters. To have made the slightest complaint would have given mortal offense to the ranchwoman, and there was no other place to pass the night. The table-cloth had once been white, but now it was

spotted, soiled, and dirty; the dishes had been white once, but now they were yellow looking and much cracked; the spoons were lead, bent and black looking; horn-handled steel knives and forks; the tea was poured out of a dingy tin tea-pot. There was an abundance of food on the table, but it was poorly cooked, and looked as though it had been thrown at the dishes; there was fried bacon swimming in fat, potatoes boiled with the skins on, bread cut in great thick, irregular slices, hot biscuits, and dried apples stewed; the butter was fresh, but not well made, and the cheese had a white and sickly look. Harry had never eaten in such a dirty place or from so ill-kept a table; he thought he could not eat a mouthful when he sat down, but the long ride over the prairie had made him ravenously hungry. The ladies, too, he noticed, scarcely touched any thing at first, but soon began to eat, and finally ate a fair supper. A hungry man or woman will eat if food is placed before them, and necessity will overcome the most dainty scruples.

After supper Harry noticed that it was a beautiful moonlight night, and asked the ladies if they would not like to step outside and enjoy it. They were most willing, and, putting on their bonnets and shawls went out with him. They walked away from the house and up the road down which they had come.

“O, mother!” exclaimed Minnie, as soon as they

were out of ear-shot of the house, "did you ever in your born days see such a dirty house?"

"I must say I never did," said Mrs. Noble, with a shudder.

"The table-cloth is not clean enough for a horse blanket," said Harry.

"And the dishes and spoons," said Minnie, indignantly.

"The floor looked like a coal-house floor," said Grace.

"And the idea of those dirty cowboys sitting down to eat with us in their dirty shirt sleeves," said Minnie.

"It's an old barrack, not fit for a stable," said Harry.

"And just to think, I gave my foot a little stir under the table, and felt something soft; I looked under the table, and there was a big dog looking up at me as if he wanted something to eat. I thought I should scream," said Minnie.

"The most remarkable part of it," said Harry, "is that, after I swallowed my disgust, I swallowed a pretty good sized supper."

"And so did I," said Minnie; "I never could believe it of myself, that I could have drank tea out of that black, battered, dirty, old tin tea-pot, or stirred my tea with that horrid, dirty, black, lead tea-spoon, or have opened my mouth wide enough to bite one of those slices of bread."

"I noticed that Grace and mother fell to, also, after awhile," said Harry, laughing.

"My dear," said Mrs. Noble, "one must eat, no matter how disgusted, if he is ravenously hungry, as we were after riding twenty-five miles over the prairie."

"If that is ranch life, I don't want one," said Minnie.

"If that was our ranch, I am sure things would be done differently, would they not, auntie?" said Grace.

"All my training and all my natural instincts would have to be changed if they were not," Mrs. Noble replied.

"But where are we going to sleep?" asked Grace.

"Now, you are asking too much," Harry replied; "but I have no doubt but the sleeping will be ~~on~~ a par with the eating."

They had walked quite a long way up the road, and now they turned back. It was a most beautiful, still, clear, moonlight night; there was a crispy coolness in the air which had that crystalline transparency and purity which is one of the most pleasing features of the north-west.

The gentle rays of the moonlight softened the rough and rude outlines of the ranchmen's home, and the play of light and shadow made it look almost beautiful. The spring-house looked like a fairy's mansion. The big barn's rudeness all vanished in the silvery light, and it looked like a majestic

building. As they approached the house they could see the cattle in the *corral*; the moonlight made them look beautiful; their many-spotted and many-colored sides shining and looking like soft, precious furs.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Mrs. Noble, as they stopped to admire the sight. "Our Father can shine upon the roughest scene and make it beautiful. It seems as though he intended there should be compensation in every thing, that the beautiful should glorify the rude."

When they entered the house they found the ranchwoman washing dishes at the end of the room, and a couple of cowboys attempting to read the papers by the dim light afforded by a lop-sided kerosene lamp with a smoky chimney.

"We would like to retire now," said Mrs. Noble to the woman.

"All right," she replied, and after lighting another lamp with a smoky chimney, escorted them into the hall and up a pair of stairs into a bedroom; passing through this room, they went into another bedroom through the frame of a door in which a door had never been hung. There were two yellow high-posted bedsteads in this room, with gay patchwork bed-quilts on the beds; there was also a rag carpet on the floor, the only carpet in the house. The ranchwoman sat the lamp down on a small stand and, wishing the ladies "Good-night," bustled out of the room.

When the ranchwoman came down stairs Harry told her he would like to retire also.

"Well, you and the other man must sleep in the room next to your mother's; you and him sleep in one bed, and the two stage-drivers in the other."

The drivers and the Chicago drummer had all come in and said they were going to bed, too; one of the drivers, taking a smoky lamp in his hand, escorted the others up stairs.

There was nothing in the bedroom but two common yellow bedsteads and a couple of rickety chairs; no carpet on the floor, no curtains in the windows, and some of the window panes were badly broken.

"Not much like the Grand Pacific Hotel, is it?" said the drummer, as they began to disrobe. The men took off only their outer clothing before they retired. The drummer, was undressed first, and jumped into bed, which rattled and creaked greatly under his weight.

"O-h-h-h!" he groaned.

"What's the matter," said Harry, laughing.

"O-h-h-h!! what's the matter, eh? This horrible bed's the matter, if you must know."

"Not a feather bed, is it?"

"Yes! a feather bed; long feathers, the kind that grows with heads on top, and they put through a threshing machine. I'd like to see the man or woman that made this bed put through a threshing machine."

"You don't seem pleased with the bed," said Harry, laughing heartily.

"Pleased! why, you can hear these confounded bed-cords creak, and the straw crackle in the next county," he said, with a groan, as he rolled over. "And these are horse blankets; the pillows about as big as your fists, and stuffed with hay; they ought to have strings tied to them so that if they got lost in a fellow's ears in the night he could pull them out in the morning, so that he would not be followed and arrested after he left the house for petit larceny."

The drivers and Harry were all laughing heartily at the drummer's discomfiture, when Harry blew out the light and they all went to bed. They could also hear the smothered laughter of the ladies in the next room.

In a few minutes the cowboys came up stairs with a lamp, and passing through the room, tramping over the bare floor with their heavy boots, ascended another flight of stairs into the loft overhead. The ranchman and his family slept down stairs in the room opposite the kitchen.

Notwithstanding the poor sleeping accommodations, it was not a great while before the heavy, steady breathing told that all were asleep.

Harry was awakened sometime in the night by the drummer suddenly starting up and exclaiming, "Where in the world does all that wind come from?"

The weather had changed, the beautiful moonlight

had gone, and a violent thunder-storm was raging. The head of the bed was next a window, and through a broken pane of glass a strong wind and a few drops of rain were blowing on them.

"Give me a blanket," exclaimed Harry, and seizing one of the blankets covering them, he leaned over the head of the bed and, with much difficulty, stuffed it into the window.

"Beds and boarding houses are bad enough in this blasted country without cyclones," growled the drummer, lying down again and going fast asleep in a few minutes, in spite of the raging storm without, which sometimes shook the house.

Harry's feelings were not quite so imperturbable as those of the drummer, and it was not until the storm had lulled that he went to sleep again.

As soon as daylight had begun to dawn in the east the cowboys got up, and in a few minutes came tramping down stairs in their heavy boots, and passed through the bedroom. Then the stage-drivers got up, dressed, and went to the barn to feed their horses.

Harry then arose, and in getting up woke the drummer.

"Time to get up?" he inquired.

"Guess so, every body seems to be getting up."

"Ugh! Ugh!"

"What's the matter?"

"Ugh! Ugh! matter? matter enough! My neck's

so stiff from that cold wind last night I can hardly move it."

He arose and dressed, grumbling and complaining continually during the operation.

"May I inquire your name?" Harry asked, curiously.

"Wash Huntbiz, salesman for a Chicago clothing house, sir; hope I may never sleep on a ranch as long as I live, sir. Ugh! my neck."

After dressing, they went down stairs and washed in the tin wash-basin outside the door. Harry went to see if his horses were properly cared for, and Wash Huntbiz went to the stage to see if his trunks had suffered in the storm; fortunately they had not. When Harry returned to the house he saw the cow-boys milking the cows, feeding the pigs, and working about the place. When he went in the house he found the landlady, with very frowsy head, preparing the breakfast. The ladies now came down stairs, and went out to the tin wash-basin to wash, Minnie with many grimaces.

Soon breakfast was ready; the ranchwoman invited them to sit down and eat. The stage-drivers came in and sat down at the table, and then Mr. Huntbiz. Breakfast was about the same as supper, coffee being substituted for tea. The meal was soon over; then there was the bustle of starting; each stage-driver took a mail-bag on his arm, went out to the barn, harnessed up his team, and drove away. Wash Huntbiz

bade the Noble family good-day, with a very ceremonious bow. Harry harnessed up his team, and drove the wagon to the house for the ladies. After paying the extremely moderate charge of the ranchwoman, they all seated themselves in the wagon and resumed their journey.

The thunder-storm had been of short duration, and left a sweet sunshiny morning in its stead.

"I'm glad to get away from that ranch," said Minnie, when they got out on the prairie.

"Did you hear the thunder-storm in the night?" Harry inquired.

"Indeed I did; I thought it was a cyclone at first."

"But you didn't have a window-pane of glass out over your bed?"

"No, I got enough of the ranch without that."

Mrs. Noble and Grace showed by the expression of their faces and their silence that they agreed with Minnie.

After crossing the creek in Oak Hollow they were in Hutchinson County. At first they found the country broken, with deep ravines, some of them so steep on the sides that they resembled the letter V, and it required Harry's most skillful driving to prevent accidents, but after awhile the prairie became more level. The next important place on their route was Scotland, in Bon Homme County. Here they expected to take dinner. The country through which they passed

seemed good prairie land, but not thickly settled, and the few settlers were mainly Russians. The style of the buildings and the appearance of the people gave a foreign air to the country. Some of them built their houses of clay, mixed with straw, making a solid wall, one-story high, and adding a steep roof. The farms of some of these people had a very prosperous look. They passed one very large mud, or clay, house; it was, perhaps, fifty feet in front and twenty feet deep, large door in the center, with two windows on each side, and high steep roof; the frames of the windows and the door were painted green; there were neat white curtains at the windows. The front door stood open, and showed a hall neatly whitewashed, with doors opening into rooms from it. In front of the house was a row of nice, young cotton-wood shade trees, and a few yards away from the front door a well with pulley and bucket. Built up close to one end of the house, of the same materials, was the farm stable, with wagons and farm implements standing in front of it; such is the Russian custom. Standing in front of the house, dressed in clean white smock frock, was a Russian, probably the owner of the farm.

They arrived at Scotland a little before noon. Entering the town they were obliged to cross a railroad, the first they had seen since they left Plankinton, and it made them feel as though they were getting back to civilization again. They found Scotland quite a flourishing country town, with quite a number of

stores and places of business. Passing up the main street they remarked that nearly all the stores were one-story and wood, had square fronts, and were nearly all the same size. The people, they learned, were mostly foreigners, Russians. They drove up to the Campbell House, a two-story house, built of blocks of a cream-colored cut stone; a well-built and handsome building. The travelers were agreeably surprised to find so fine a house on the frontier; neither were they disappointed upon entering it, but found it, in its appointments, equal to a good hotel in an eastern town, and superior to many of them. Harry learned afterward that "Campbell," the owner, had made sixty thousand dollars in a sod house which he built for the entertainment of travelers when the Black Hills' mining excitement first broke out. This sod house was ninety feet long and thirty feet wide; it was one undivided large room. Besides keeping house in it, he had billiard tables and a bar. For the privilege of providing their own blankets and sleeping on the floor, he charged guests nightly one dollar. The weather was so cold that the unfortunate gold-seekers were glad to get shelter from the cold at that price. When the tide turned, and the miners began to come back without money, he gave up his sod hotel.

After a good dinner and a good rest the travelers resumed their journey, having twenty-eight miles farther to go to Yankton. They passed over a

similar prairie country, from Scotland to Yankton, as before reaching Scotland. It was not very thickly settled, and the settlers seemed to be mainly foreigners, Russians and Bohemians. As they approached nearer to Yankton they observed that the land near the city was less-thickly settled than land much farther back. They learned afterward that such is likely to be the case near large towns in the Territory, for the reason that speculators, early in the history of the place, buy up these convenient lands and hold them for high prices; thus driving poor but thrifty settlers into the interior.

As they drew near Yankton they made many surmises as to what kind of a place it was; as to the appearance of the Missouri River—the bluffs of which they could now see, the traffic on its waters, etc.

“My idea of the place,” said Harry,” is that it is a stirring, active place on the banks of the river. The river, I think, must be much like the Mississippi, and that there are many steam-boats carrying much freight and many passengers constantly, coming to and departing from it; so that a traveler may, almost any day, have an opportunity to go north or south on a handsome steam-boat.”

“I expect you will think me very foolish, Harry,” said Grace, “when I tell you that I have been thinking of what a figure we shall make entering Yankton in this gay farm wagon. I did not mind it in the country, but Yankton is the capital of the Territory,

and there must be a good many well-dressed and even fashionable people there."

"What would our Jersey City and New York friends think of us if they could see us?" said Minnie, laughing.

"You know, Grace," said Harry, "that we are preemptors now and our style is in perfect keeping with our business."

"I confess," said Mrs. Noble, slowly, "that I have some feeling on the subject; but, after all, we appear to be just what we are, and we have nothing to be ashamed of in riding in a nice clean farm wagon to preempt government land; indeed, if our appearance is not quite fashionable, the proceeding is eminently a dignified one."

"You always strike the right key-note, auntie; you have made me ashamed of my foolish scruples. Drive on, Harry," laughingly said Grace.

When they reached the top of the bluff they looked down upon a rather scattered town, with wide streets, built in the bend of the river. The river was broad and its current swift, the water of a yellow clay color; the banks on either side were flat, and subject to disastrous freshets. On the other side was the State of Nebraska, and on the flat bottom-land over there was some fine, large timber. Looking down into the streets they seemed quiet, but few vehicles or pedestrians in them, and they not hurried. On the river they saw no shipping, except

one quite large steam ferry-boat, which was crossing to Nebraska.

"How's this!" exclaimed Harry; "where are all my steamers and shipping?"

"And your active, busy town?" said Minnie.

"I am surprised," said Harry; "the shipping certainly is not there, but perhaps the town will improve on close inspection."

They drove down into the city, and through broad but quiet streets to the "Jencks House." They found the "Jencks House" quite a large and comfortable house; it was painted canary color. The table and beds were good. The house was supplied with water from an artesian well, from which the water overflowed, and ran in a clear stream down the gutter in the street. The water seemed to be strongly impregnated with iron; it left a reddish sediment on vessels in which it was used. It was styled "magnetic water."

After supper the Noble family took a walk through the town, and down to the banks of the river.

Yankton is a place of about forty-five hundred inhabitants; it is about twenty-five years old, and its large stores, hotels, etc., indicated that at one time it was a busy town. It once enjoyed a large river trade, but after the railroads reached the river, north of it, the steam-boats used their *termini* as their loading places for supplies for more northern country. For twenty-

five years it had been the capital of the Territory, but could not have expected to be so permanently, for in all that time it had not built a capitol building. Bismarck was now named for the capital, which also injured the business of the place; so that the once busy town had a depressed and dispirited air.

Next morning the Noble family repaired to the office of a land attorney. He received them politely, drew up the necessary papers, and directed them to the land-office. This was a small one-story building on a side street; it was painted white, and looked like a country school-house or small church. Entering, they found themselves in a rather small room, with a counter running entirely across the front. A rather languid-looking official took the papers which Harry handed him; he glanced at them. Harry handed him the fees, and they retired.

"That did not take long," Grace said.

"No," Harry replied; "we simply made our declaratory statements. I have a preemption form I will read to you:

"I, Harry Noble, of Douglas County, Territory of Dakota, being a citizen of the United States, have since the first day of April, A. D. 1883, settled and improved the — quarter of section No. —, in township No. —, of range No. —, in the district of lands subject to sale at the land-office at Yankton, and containing 160 acres, which land has been ren-

dered subject to private entry prior to my settlement thereon; and I do hereby declare my intention to claim said tract of land as a preemption right, under section 2,259 of the revised statutes of the United States.

“ ‘Given under my hand this — day of —, A. D. 1883.

“ ‘In presence of ——. HARRY NOBLE.’ ”

After a good dinner they started home again, having made up their minds to drive to Scotland and remain there all night, instead of the Oak Hollow ranch.

The journey home passed without incident, and they found when they arrived at Nobleton that nothing had been disturbed during their absence. Right glad were they to get back again, although they had a very pleasant trip, the retrospect of which was pleasant, despite the discomforts of the journey.

CHAPTER VIII.

Learning to plow—Miss Fanny Foundit, the preemtor—Mrs. Snow and her four children hunting land—The Snow children visit the Noble family—Minnie's and Grace's experiences as nurses—The mysterious letter lost and found.

RETURNING home from his trip to Yankton, Harry noticed that the farmers were beginning to plow, and made up his mind that upon his arrival home he would make his maiden effort at that rudimentary farming work. The next day after his arrival he drove to Land View and purchased a plow. Not feeling quite competent to undertake the work without some instruction, he engaged a farm laborer for a week to help him. Seeing a fine cow and calf for sale, he purchased them, thinking he might as well learn to milk from the laborer as well as to plow. The milk would be a welcome addition to their table, and the girls could soon learn to make butter. The cow and calf were also to be the beginning of an extensive herd, which he could now see in imagination grazing, in large numbers, on the fertile acres of Nobleton. When he arrived at home the young ladies came out and admired the cow and calf, which were very gentle; but being raised in the city, and not being accustomed to cattle, they

were a little afraid of them. Harry took his first lesson in milking; he was not very successful at first, but after a few lessons became quite expert. They found sweet, fresh milk a great addition to their simple bill of fare, and the girls found they could greatly increase the variety of dishes on their table. The calf became quite a pet, and soon learned to know and recognize her friends whenever they came near her. Harry had purchased an extra camp bedstead, and the laborer shared his "shack" with him. The next morning they were up with the sun, and had a very early breakfast, for there was the cow to milk, and the real farm work was to commence that day.

The laborer harnessed the horses to the plow, and plowed a furrow on one side of Harry's quarter section; then Harry took hold of the plow handles and made the attempt to plow a furrow on one of the other sides, but made a failure, rather to the amusement of the laborer, who took hold of the plow handles again and finished the furrow. Harry's plan was to plow two furrows on each side of each claim, so that they would be clearly marked and prevent difficulty about division lines in the future. This plan is frequently adopted by settlers. After a while Harry took the plow handles again, and succeeded a little better. By persevering and plowing at intervals, by degrees he learned to plow and to guide the horses. At night, when the day's plowing was finished, he

was perfectly tired out, and, after eating his supper, retired to bed in his shanty with few words. But as he improved in plowing his strength increased, so that after a few days' work he did not feel so sore and tired at night. It is not to be expected that a young man raised in a city and trained in an office can at once be inured to the hard work of a farm, nor without much weariness. Harry's softened muscles soon became hard, his flesh firm, his face brown and ruddy.

At the end of the week he drove to Land View with the laborer, confident that, with perhaps a little occasional help from an experienced person, he could get along with the farm work. On this visit to Land View he purchased some chickens, and on his return made a coop for them. The family thus had eggs added to their table fare, and, in a few weeks, several broods of little chickens were peeping around the place, with their fussy, cackling, scratching mothers.

On another trip he purchased a Gordon setter pup, a beautiful little dog, with glossy black back and sides and tan-colored belly, his hair soft and slightly curly. The ladies were a little afraid of him at first, but he was so gentle and affectionate that he soon became the pet of all. Grace named him "Puck."

One day Harry was plowing a long distance from the houses when he saw a lady riding toward him on horseback. She wore short skirts, and was riding

sideways on a gentleman's saddle. Harry stopped his horses as she rode toward him.

"Good-day, sir," she said, brusquely.

"Good-day," Harry replied.

"Your claim?"

"Yes, it is my claim."

"Looks like good land. Location's good, too."

"I think so. Are you looking for land?"

"Yes; I was out here somewhere a few days ago, looking at a claim with a land agent; think I will preempt it, but wanted to have another look at it before doing so. I thought I could find it myself, but I have been looking all over for the corners and can't find them. I saw you plowing here and thought you might help me."

"I will be pleased to do so if I can. Have you the numbers?"

"Yes. Here they are on this paper."

"O, I can take you to them quite easily. They are about a mile south-west of us."

"Should be thankful to you if you would."

"I will, with pleasure. But it is nearly noon; permit me to ask you to come and take dinner with us. I live over there," pointing to the houses, "with my mother, sister, and mother's ward. My friends will be pleased to entertain you."

"Thank you; yes. Ever so much obliged. I'm very hungry; have been riding about all the morning."

Harry drove his team over to the houses, and the

young lady walked her horse alongside. When they had nearly arrived at the houses she said to him :

“O, I haven’t told my name ; it is Miss Fanny Foundit.”

“And mine, Harry Noble.”

As they approached the house Mrs. Noble and the girls, who had seen the lady coming, came to the door to receive her, wondering who she could be.

“A claim hunter,” was Minnie’s prediction.

When they arrived at the house Harry left his team and went toward Miss Foundit to assist her to alight, and Grace ran into the house and came out with a chair ; but Miss Foundit, with a quick, “No, thank you,” leaped to the ground, and handed the bridle to Harry.

Harry introduced her to the ladies, who, glad to see one of their own sex, cordially invited her into the house, asked her to take off her things and take dinner with them.

“Shall be most happy ; am awful hungry. Dakota air gives a person a monstrous good appetite.”

Grace escorted her into the bedroom, from which she shortly returned and seated herself in a chair with the exclamation, “Land sakes ! what a nice house you’ve got !”

Although we have called Fanny Foundit a young lady, yet she was a young lady of doubtful age. Youthful and effusive in her manners, which were largely assumed, she was lively and brusque, pleasant,

or sharp and acid, as her moods and interests dictated. She was of medium height, rather spare in figure, with pale blue eyes, thin dark hair, and small nose. She dressed in rather gay colors, on the assumption that they made her appear more youthful.

Dinner was soon ready, and Fanny Foundit was given a chair at the table. The fact that she ate heartily and said but little was evidence that she had accurately described the condition of her appetite. When finished, she turned to Mrs. Noble and said :

"Indeed, Mrs. Noble, I never thought I should be lucky enough to get such a good dinner out on the prairie."

"It is not a very good dinner," Mrs. Noble said, deprecatingly, "for we have no fresh meat to offer you."

"That is a luxury which I don't expect out here on ordinary occasions ; the time for butcher wagons has not arrived in this country yet."

"You design to take a claim ; are you not afraid to live alone on a claim, especially to sleep alone at night ?"

"I suppose I shall be a little timid at first—think a man would be as well as a woman ; but as Uncle Sam offers every American citizen, male or female, twenty-one years of age or over, a farm for the taking of it, I'm bound to take mine, in spite of a little timidity."

"She is looking for a claim near us, mother," said Harry.

"I hope you will be our neighbor," Mrs. Noble said.

"I hope so, too, for your family, ma'am, is about the pleasantest I have met out here. If the land on that claim is pretty fair land you may count on me for a neighbor."

"What led you to take this step of taking a homestead?" Grace inquired, a little curiously.

"I'll tell you. I was a school-teacher back in Wisconsin; taught eight years. Father and mother are dead; brothers and sisters all married and have homes of their own. I got tired of visiting among them, and being pestered with their children. Having saved a few hundred dollars, and looking for a home of my own, I caught the Dakota fever, and here I am, and don't intend to go back until I own one hundred and sixty acres of this grand Dakota prairie."

"I hope you will be successful," said Mrs. Noble.

"I hope I shall," she said, rising. "Can I have my horse?"

"I will go and saddle him," said Harry, leaving the room.

After he had left the room Minnie proposed that Harry should harness the horses to the wagon and Mrs. Noble and Grace go with them to help Fanny Foundit find the claim, saying that she would wash the dishes and put them away. Not being unwilling to take a ride on a pleasant day, they accepted her

kind offer, and Grace called after Harry to harness the horses to the wagon. So they drove over the prairie in the wagon and Fanny Foundit rode alongside.

Harry found the corners of the claim without difficulty, and then accompanied Fanny Foundit over the land with the team on a tour of inspection.

"A pretty good quarter section; don't you think so, Mrs. Noble?"

"Yes. I think it a right good piece of land."

"I'll preempt it. Do you know where I can hire a carpenter to put up a claim shanty?"

"Yes, there is Joe Brown at Land View; he built ours."

"All right. I'll see him when I go back, and have him put up one to-morrow; the next day I'll go to Yankton on the stage and make my declaratory statement. In less than a week I'll be living in my shanty. Hope you will come to see me often."

"We shall be pleased to do so," said Mrs. Noble, kindly. "I trust you will favor us with your company frequently."

"Do not be alarmed about that, for I expect I shall be so awful lonesome that I'll spend more than half of my time at your house. Good-bye till I see you all again," and striking her horse with her whip she galloped away toward Land View.

"How do you think you will like our new neighbor, that is to be?" Harry inquired of Grace, as they rode homeward.

"I do not know," said Grace, with a doubtful look.

"We must treat her kindly," said Mrs. Noble, compassionately, "for I am sure the poor girl will be lonesome living all alone."

"She's a pretty old girl, I think," said Harry.

A few days afterward a farm wagon drove up to Mrs. Noble's house containing a land agent, a small, frail, little woman, dressed in black, and four lively small children—two boys and two girls. Mrs. Noble stepped to the door and kindly invited them to come in and rest awhile.

"Thank you," said the lady; "I think I will come in a little while, for I would like to have some conversation with you about the country." She accordingly descended from the wagon and the agent lifted the children out. Mrs. Noble gave the lady a seat in the house, and the children amused themselves outside playing with the dog, chasing the chickens, and teasing the calf. The agent drove over to where Harry was plowing. The lady seated herself with a little sigh, and in a low voice introduced herself to the Noble ladies, who were all in the room.

"My name," she said, "is Jane Snow. I am a widow, as you may have supposed from these black clothes," wiping her eyes with a black bordered handkerchief. "My husband was a soldier in the late war; he served between four and five years. He died about a year ago, leaving me with my four children. A few months ago I received several hun-

dred dollars back pay and bounty. I also receive a small pension. A friend of mine told me that by living a year on it, I was entitled to one hundred and sixty acres of land from the government, and as I have nothing else to leave my dear children," wiping her eyes, "I thought it my duty to secure the land; so I came here from Iowa for that purpose."

"Your object is a very worthy one," said Mrs. Noble, kindly; but it is a great undertaking for you."

"Yes, it is, and it will be very lonesome on the prairie; but I think no one will molest a widow and her little children."

"Have you found a claim that pleases you?" Mrs. Noble inquired.

"I have been looking at one near your land, and drove over to ask you if the land is good."

"My son Harry says the land is very good, and we consider the location desirable."

"Then I shall settle here."

"We shall be pleased to have you for a neighbor; you must come and see us often, and bring the children."

"I shall be glad to do so, and I hope you and the young ladies will come often and see me."

"I beg pardon, we have not introduced ourselves," said Mrs. Noble. Then she told her the names of all the family.

"When will you go to Yankton to make entry of the claim?" Minnie inquired.

"I would like to go right away, but I don't know what to do with the children; I cannot take them with me, and I cannot leave them at the hotel. I really don't know what to do with them."

The tears gathered in her eyes, and she seemed sorely perplexed.

Mrs. Noble's sympathetic nature at once responded: "If we had a place for them to sleep, I would be glad to take charge of your darlings while you are away."

"You are too kind," said Mrs. Snow, wiping her eyes. "I'm sorry to trouble you, but the children can sleep anywhere; any kind of a made-up bed on the floor will do for them."

The young ladies looked rather frightened at the prospect of having four lively children in the house for several days, but made no remarks.

"I will get a carpenter to put me up a house with a couple of rooms in it. I guess he can have it nearly finished by the time I get back. I shall be so glad to get out of that crowded little hotel."

"When will you bring the children?" Mrs. Noble inquired.

"I will bring them here to-morrow morning with their clothes, then I can start for Yankton on the stage at noon."

The agent drove up with the team. Mrs. Snow arose from her chair and, in a plaintive voice, called: "Children! children! Tom! Jack! Jenny! Aggy! We're going now, dears!"

The children boisterously ran up to the wagon, and began to clamber up the wheels.

"Don't get in the wagon yet, dears; come here, I want to introduce you to these kind ladies; they are going to take care of you while mamma goes away for a few days."

Mamma going away!" cried the youngest, beginning to howl.

"Not to-day, dear," said the mother, soothingly. They then came to her, and she told the ladies their names and ages: Thomas, ten years old; John, eight; Jenny, six; and Aggy, four. Grace won her way to their hearts by giving them each a piece of cake. They then all got into the wagon and it drove away.

"What do you think, Harry?" said Minnie, running up to him when he came into supper. "We're going to have four children visit us for several days; coming to-morrow morning; Mrs. Snow's our new neighbor."

"Well, if they don't stir up our quiet family!" exclaimed Harry, laughing heartily.

"We shall not be lonesome while they are here," said Grace, smiling; "for the manner in which they stirred up 'Puck,' the calf, and the chickens, in the short time they were here, was remarkable."

"How different the ways of a new country from older settled ones," said Mrs. Noble, at the tea-table. "Here a strange woman drops in on us and trusts us with her children for several days; while we, who

are unaccustomed to children and have no comfortable place to put them to sleep, offer to take them; but the exigencies of the case made it right, for the poor widow can do no better, and we, through sympathy, are glad to assist her."

The next morning Mrs. Snow and her little "flock of Snow birdies," as their mother called them, arrived, with a trunk full of their clothing. Minnie took them out to play with the calf, while their mother drove quietly away. Minnie and Grace had agreed to take charge of them on alternate days. Minnie was to have them the first day. They were clever, good natured children, but extremely active and lively. Minnie took them down to the lake soon after their mother had departed, thinking that would be a capital place to amuse them; they could play in the sand on the shore, and watch the wild ducks swimming in the water. But Jack, who was of a nautical turn of mind, tied a string to a piece of wood for a boat, and while standing on the little stone pier to float it lost his footing and fell in. Minnie rushed to the rescue and dragged him out by the hair and coat collar; then she escorted him, bawling, up to the house to change his clothes, the other three following in single file to see what would be done with him.

"Accident number one," said Minnie, hot and breathless, as she led him up to the house.

"I couldn't help it! boo-hoo-hoo; foot slipped, fell in—don't whip me."

"No, we will not whip you, poor child," said Mrs. Noble, soothingly ;" but you must change your clothes at once, or you will take cold. Grace dear, open the trunk and hunt him a dry suit." The other children, who had been hanging around the door to see if Jack would get a whipping, having satisfied themselves on the point, started out in pursuit of pleasures new. Tom thought he could find a nest of chickens' eggs in the barn, so they all started to hunt it, leaving Minnie sitting in the house. In the flurry about Jack she had forgotten the others. Directly there was a shrill scream of a child, followed by another and another.

"My gracious!" cried Minnie, jumping up and rushing out to the barn, "which one of those young ones is killed now?"

The cause of the uproar was that Aggy had been more successful than Tom in finding a hen's nest; but the old hen was sitting on it, hatching, and she resented the little dumpling hands trying to take her eggs, by picking them. Aggy was so frightened, and the bites smarted so badly, that she had not sense enough to move out of reach, but simply kept screaming, knowing, from past experience, that help would speedily come.

Minnie caught Aggy up in her arms and carried her back to the house; bathed her chubby little hands to stop the smarting; talked soothingly to her, and rocked her. Aggy's fright and pain were soon over,

and Minnie gave her a picture-book to look at, on the floor, while she started out to see what the other three were doing ; for Jack, dryly clad and spirits restored, had joined the others.

She found them out near the stable. Tom had found some string, and he and Jack were trying to harness the calf to a small wooden box. The calf was an uncertain steed. She would stand quietly for a few minutes, then suddenly walk away, the two boys trying to hold her back ; but she walked away with both holding fast to her. After wandering around awhile she would allow the harnessing operation to proceed quietly, then, with a sudden movement, would kick up her heels, upset the box, and tangle the harness. Minnie saw that the operation of harnessing was likely to occupy the boys' attention for some time, and they were likely to suffer no great harm. Jenny was playing with an old rag-doll, which she had brought with her, in the shade not far from her brothers. There were no more accidents before dinner, and Minnie began to think she would have no more trouble that day. When Harry came in to dinner he spoke kindly to them, for he was fond of children, and they all seemed to take a fancy to him, particularly the boys, who invited themselves to go and help him plow after dinner. Harry permitted them, and Minnie thought she was rid of half her charge for the afternoon. Out in the field the boys insisted on riding, and Harry mounted one on each horse. They

behaved themselves for awhile, for they were rather timid, never having been on horses' backs before; but after riding awhile Tom's courage became very great, and he became so confident of his security and equestrian skill that he began to cut up antics. The danger was not apparent to Harry, but soon Tom lost his balance and fell off the horse, not hurting himself much. His pants caught in the harness as he fell, and he tore a terrible rent in them. In that dilapidated condition Harry sent him to the house for repairs, and Jack with him, not caring to run any more risks at that time.

"O, did you ever!" cried Minnie, who was sitting on the door-step, as Tom and Jack came to the house, Tom holding his torn garment together as well as he could.

"It's your day to-day," said Grace, laughing.

"And the day is most over, thank goodness!" Minnie replied, while she walked Tom in, seated him on a chair, and hunted for another pair of pants in the trunk. She gave Tom and Jack picture-books to look at, and commenced to mend Tom's pants.

Jenny and Aggy were playing outside in view, and Tom and Jack were absorbed in pictures. Minnie thought she had them all safe now, but the mending rather puzzled her, for she was unaccustomed to mending boys' pants, and in making the jagged places fit together she forgot the children for a few minutes. Suddenly there was a loud scream.

"What's the matter now?" cried Minnie, dropping the pants, jumping up, and rushing out. She found Jenny lying, face downward, on the ground, holding her hand in her mouth, and screaming, "O, my hand! O, my hand!" Aggy was standing beside her, looking frightened, and the calf was rollicking about near by. Minnie lifted the child up and found her hand had struck a stone in falling, and was cut and bleeding. The children had been trying to feed the calf with hay; she had made a dash toward Jenny, who, in trying to run, fell and cut her hand. Minnie carried her into the house, tied a cloth on the wound, and rocked her awhile. It was now nearly supper-time. After supper the children said their prayers and were put in a temporary bed on the floor in Mrs. Noble's and Grace's room. They had a good frolic before they went to sleep. The Noble family went in to look at the children after they were asleep; they looked very pretty. "They look very sweet," Minnie said, "but children are a sight of trouble."

"They are a great trouble, dear," said Mrs. Noble, "but how could we do without them? How could I have done without them?"

"But we were never as troublesome as these youngsters, mother?" said Minnie.

"I would not like to say, dear," said her mother, kissing her.

Very early next morning Grace was awakened by

a whispered, "Aggy ! Aggy !" She looked to where the children lay, and saw Jenny leaning on her elbow over Aggy, and calling her softly, trying to waken her.

"Don't waken the other children, dear," Grace whispered to her. "Let the children sleep as long as they can." Jenny lay down quickly. Grace arose and began to dress. Mrs. Noble arose also. As soon as Grace had made a rapid toilet she whispered softly to Jenny to come to her to get dressed. Jenny arose as quickly as she could, but, nevertheless, awoke Aggy in doing so. Aggy sat up, rubbing her big blue eyes, and then, slowly looking around, said, "Where is I ?"

"Visitin' till mamma comes back," Jenny replied.

"I want my mamma," with tears in her eye.

"Don't cry, Aggy dear," said Jenny, running to her, throwing her arms around her neck, kissing and soothing her. "Guess mamma will be back to-morrow."

Aggy was quieted, but the boys awoke now and directly began a pillow fight. Mrs. Noble told them to get up and dress themselves, which they began to do; and told Grace to attend to Jenny's and Aggy's toilets, and she would get breakfast. But Minnie ran in, when she opened the door, and, going into the bedroom, exclaimed, in simulated horror: "O, Grace, it's your day to take care of the children, and it's beginning to rain !"

"It's rainin'! it's rainin'!" the children cried, running to door and windows to verify the statement.

"Never mind if it is raining; we will have a good time if it is, wont we, children?" said Grace.

The children did not fall in with Grace's desire as readily as she had hoped.

"It's nicer out," said one of the girls, and "I want to ride one of the plow-horses," said one of the boys.

By the time Mrs. Noble and Minnie had breakfast prepared Harry had come in from feeding the animals, and the children were dressed and ready for breakfast.

Any person who has had charge of several lively children, confined in a small house on a rainy day, will have some conception of the duty devolving upon Grace that day. But Grace was fond of children, and they generally "took to her;" besides, she was of more equable temperament than Minnie, and, consequently, less likely to become worried and excited than that young lady. After breakfast she improvised a little school, and tested the intellectual attainments of the little Snows. She discovered that the boys could read a little—that Jenny could spell, and Aggy knew the alphabet. After school she introduced a succession of games and plays, and so interested did they become, and so much amused were they, that it was dinner-time almost before they knew it. Minnie looked on in wonder, and Mrs. Noble smiled complacently.

After dinner Grace seated them around her and began to read stories to them, to which they listened with great interest.

“Mamma often reads stories to us, and we all like to listen,” said Tom. After a while she read them a story of a wounded soldier in the late war, in which they became intensely interested.

“Did you know my papa was a soldier in the war—a lieutenant?” queried Tom of Grace.

“Yes, your mother told me,” Grace replied.

“O, but you ought to have seen him when the Grand Army of the Republic paraded; they had soldier clothes on, and a brass band, and a flag, and the boys all ran after them. This is the way they marched; we’ll show you. I’ll play the big drum,” beating an invisible drum with his fists. “Jack, you play the big horn.” Jack extended his little arms, as though holding the horn, expanded his fat cheeks, and blew pouf, pouf. “Jenny, you get the broom for a flag.” Jenny obeyed orders. “Aggy, you be a soldier. Now, fall into line. March!”

Thus the juvenile soldiers paraded up and down and around the little rooms until they were tired. The procession then broke up, and the children gathered around Grace’s chair again. She took Aggy on her lap.

“But last year my papa got sick and died,” said Jack, sadly. The children all looked very sober.

“He was such a good papa,” said Jack. “We

used to have such fun with him; he used to play games with us, and tell us stories, and go to picnics with us, and take us fishin'."

"Yes; and he took me a-huntin'," said Tom.

"We had to keep so quiet when he was sick," said Jenny, "and mamma cried so much when papa got so bad; and once, when I was alone with her, she put her arms around me and kissed me, and cried and cried. Then she said to me, 'O, Jenny, I'm afraid papa will die.' Then I got frightened and cried, too; then, after a while, she told me not to tell any one what she said, and I promised."

"Do you all remember how he sent for us all to come to his room and see him before he died?" said Tom.

"I 'member," said Aggy, looking up with her sincere blue eyes into Grace's face, "I 'member; us all went in, an' papa's room so dark, mamma sittin' 'side his bed, face in handkercher, cryin'; papa look so white, so weak, couldn't hardly lift his hand; an' he talk so low; couldn't hardly hear him. He tell Tom 'Come.' Tom go 'side his bed, an' papa kiss him an' say, 'Good-bye;' then he kiss Jack an' say, 'Good-bye;' then he kiss Jenny an' say, 'Good-bye;' mamma be crying so hard all time; then mamma lift me up an' say, 'God bless and keep my baby!' then I cry, an' we all cry so hard. Papa not speak for long time; then he say, 'I dyin' an' goin' to heaven, to Jesus; boys and girls, be good to your muzzer, an'

to one anozer,' an we say, 'We will.' Then he say, 'I want you all to promise to be good an' love Jesus, an' meet me in heaven,' an' his eyes look so he want us say 'Yes' so much, an' we all say 'Yes;' and we're a-goin' to, aint we?" looking around appealingly to her brothers and sisters.

"Yes," they all answered, in low voices. God hears and helps such promises.

The ladies were all crying when Aggy had finished her touching story. Harry, to conceal his emotions, had gone to the window and looked out upon the rain, which was pattering on the roof and dropping from the eaves.

"Did your papa ever read Bible stories to you, children?" Grace inquired, directly.

"O, yes; often," they chorused.

"I remember about Noah's ark," said Jenny. "I'll tell you, God told Noah it was going to rain a great big flood an' drown all the people in the world, but him and his family, and he must make a big ark to save his family and all kinds of animals and things."

"Why did God save Noah and his family?" Grace inquired.

"O, because Noah was a good man, and all the people in the world were bad, and God was sorry he made them; why! they wouldn't believe Noah, that the world was going to be drowned. He was a hundred and twenty years makin' the ark. Papa

thinks the people came around him and laughed and made jokes at him for makin' such a big ship on dry land. But he kept on buildin' all the same," said Tom.

"'Cos he believed God more than the people," said Jack.

"Then when the ark was done," Jenny continued, "God told Noah to go in with his family and take in all kinds of animals, an' birds, an' snakes, an' worms, an' all kinds of crawlin' things."

"My! I'd like to have stood by and seen the procession," said Tom; "the big elephants, and the giraffes, with their long necks, and the lions and tigers I guess went first."

"Guess not," said Aggy. "Guess God would tell the mouses an' squirrels an' rabbits an' such little things to go in first, fear the big animals would step on them."

"How funny it must have looked to see the snakes and turtles and such things goin' in," said Jack, "and the birds all flyin' in, eagles, crows, robins, wrens, chickens, hawks, canary birds, bats, parrots, and all kinds."

"Just to think," said Jenny, "the ark had only one door and window; when Noah and his family and every thing went in, it began to rain."

"And rained forty days an' nights," said Jack.

"And the whole world was drowned, all the people and every thing," continued Jenny.

"Guess the people wished they had minded God better when it began to rain so hard an' drowned them," said Tom.

"Then the water began to go down," Jenny continued. "Noah sent a raven to see if the water was all off the ground, but the raven never came back; then after awhile he sent a dove, and the dove came back; in a few days he sent it again, and it came back with an olive branch in its mouth. Then Noah knew the trees were growin' again. Soon he sent the dove out again, an it didn't come back any more; then he knew the flood was over."

"You know the story very well, Jenny dear," said Grace, kissing the child.

"Yes; but I know the story of David and Goliath," said Jack, earnestly; "that's a good one; shall I tell it to you?"

"Yes," Grace answered. "Yes! yes! tell her," chorused the children.

"Well, you see," Jack said, beginning his story, "David was a shepherd; his father's name was Jesse. He had seven brothers older than himself, and there came a great war between the Jews and the Philistines, and three of David's brothers went to the war, and David had to stay at home and tend the sheep. One day David's father called him and told him to take some things to the camp for his brothers to eat; so David started. When he got to the camp he heard Goliath, a big Philistine giant, come out of their camp

and dare any of the Jews to fight him; but he was so big and strong that they were all afraid; and Saul, the king of the Jews, said, if any one would go and fight Goliath, and kill him, he would make him rich, and let him marry his daughter. But the Jews were all afraid. David said he would fight Goliath, but his brothers and the other soldiers made fun of him, and told him to go home and tend his sheep. But Saul heard what David had said, and sent for him; when he saw David, he told him he couldn't fight Goliath, but David said he could, and told Saul how he killed a lion and a bear that carried away a lamb. Then Saul said he might try and fight the giant, and dressed him in his armor; but David wasn't used to armor, and took it off again. Then he went and got five smooth stones out of the brook, and his sling, and went to fight Goliath. The giant was awful mad when he saw such a young good-lookin' fellow comin' to fight him with only a sling, and he hallooed and talked awful nasty to David. But David answered back, that God was on his side and would help him, and that he would kill Goliath and cut off his head. Then David ran to the giant to fight him, and he took a smooth stone out of his bag and put it in his sling and threw it at the giant with all his might. He made a good shot, for the stone hit the giant in the forehead and sunk in, and he fell down; and David ran and drew the giant's sword and cut off his head with his own sword. You'd better believe

the Philistines were frightened and ran away, and the Jews after them and killed lots of them."

"You have certainly told the story remarkably well," said Grace, approvingly.

"Now I want to show you how David threw the stone," said Jack, ferreting a marble and a piece of string from the mysterious depths of his pockets.

"Be careful, Jack," said Grace, "or you will break something."

"O, no, I wont," he said, adjusting the marble in the sling and giving it a whirl.

Whiz—crash—crash—a sound of falling pieces of glass.

"O, dear!" exclaimed Minnie, throwing up her hands, "there goes the only looking-glass in the house."

Grace was startled, Jack looked guilty, and the other children looked frightened.

"Never mind," said Grace, directly, getting up and beginning to pick up the pieces; "he did not mean to do it; the next time I go to Land View I will buy another one."

The children behaved well until bed-time. The next morning was pleasant and they played outside without any serious mishaps until their mother arrived to claim her own "Snow birdies."

Mrs. Snow's house was far enough advanced for her to move into it in a couple of days; in the meantime she was the guest of the Nobles, sharing Mrs.

Noble's bed, and Grace becoming Minnie's guest. The young ladies still necessarily had much to do with the children, but felt the burden of responsibility taken from their shoulders by their mother's presence. When Mrs. Snow's meager furniture and other worldly goods arrived, the Noble family assisted her greatly in getting settled in her prairie home. They had in the meantime become quite attached to the children, and invited them to visit Nobleton often, an invitation which the children were not slow to accept.

"Well, I must say," said Minnie, after they had the "Snows" all settled in their new homes, "those children were a sight of trouble; but I became very fond of them, and the house seems dull without them." A sentiment which was echoed by the whole family; an almost universal tribute paid by kind-hearted people to noisy, happy, loving children.

Mrs. Noble was not a robust woman, and had always been considered delicate in health, but not positively sickly. The free enjoyment of unbounded, pure Dakota air seemed to impart new vigor and life to her, notwithstanding the deprivations to which she was subjected, and her family began to congratulate themselves upon the marked improvement in her health. But a day or two after the Snows left, her family observed that she had a perplexed and distressed look which to them was unaccountable; she seemed to be in deep thought, and often absent-

mind, very much absorbed in some train of thought; her replies were sometimes irrelevant, and she often requested queries to be repeated. This self-absorption began to tell upon her health; she became pale and languid. Her family noticed and wondered. They often asked her if she was not feeling well.

"O, yes," she would reply, in surprise at the question; "perfectly well."

One evening Minnie and Grace had gone to the lake for a bucket of water, and Mrs. Noble and Harry were left alone in her house; she seemed to be still in the same perplexed, absorbed condition of mind; she hardly seemed to notice the girls going, yet after they had gone she spoke suddenly to Harry.

"Harry, my son, I am very much distressed."

"I am sorry to hear it, mother, but I have observed for several days that you were not yourself; what can be the matter? I am entirely at a loss, even to conjecture the cause. All our affairs, as far as I am aware, are in a very prosperous condition."

"You never could conjecture, Harry, because it has been a great secret. I have been hesitating whether to tell you or not; but I have come to the conclusion that you ought to know, and perhaps you can help me in the distressing position in which I am placed, although I am not able to see how you can; yet you are a man now, and the only one in the family; so if you cannot assist me, you can help me bear the burden."

"It is hardly necessary for me to tell you, mother, that I shall be glad to help you in any way, either in counsel, to the best of my ability, or in burden-bearing."

Then listen, my son. You are aware that Mr. Constant made your father and I Grace's guardians, and left her an annuity of \$400 per annum, which is regularly paid to her quarterly?"

"Yes, mother, I am well aware of those facts."

"Now comes the secret. Grace's father gave your father a sealed letter which was to be delivered to her when she was twenty-one years old, the existence of which was to be kept a profound secret until it was delivered to her. In the event of your father's death I was to become the custodian of the letter, and was to deliver it to her when she became of age. Before your father died he gave me the letter. I have kept it secretly and securely ever since. I packed it in my trunk when we came West; I saw it again in my trunk at the hotel in Land View. A few days ago I went to my trunk to look for it, to ascertain if it was secure, and it was gone. I could scarcely believe my own eyes, but after a most diligent and careful search I could not find it."

"It seems very strange," said Harry, "where it has gone to; there are no thieves here."

"That is true, and that is why its disappearance is so unaccountable; nevertheless it is gone, and what I am going to do I don't know; it will soon be Grace's.

twenty-first birthday, and she ought to have the letter."

"Do you not know what was in the letter?"

"No, I do not. I am in profound ignorance of its contents; if I knew, then its loss would not be so important, for I could tell her; but as it is, the loss seems inexcusable of a letter which may be important; so I am, as you have observed, distressed and perplexed concerning it."

"O, I guess it was of no great importance; he left her money in an annuity, and I suppose this letter only contained a number of pages of good advice to be read on her twenty-first birthday."

"Perhaps so, but there was rather a singular request accompanying the letter; her father requested that she should not marry until she had read the letter. I have never told her of its existence, because she never has seemed to care to marry yet; and I was instructed not to tell her of his request unless she became engaged."

"Perhaps her father thought she would be likely to make a more sensible choice of a husband after she was twenty-one, and took this measure to delay any possible marriage before that time," said Harry.

"Possibly your surmise may be correct; I am all at sea on the subject. But Mr. Constant did not seem to be a man who would attempt to accomplish his purpose by indirection."

"Well, mother, we'll send the girls over to Mrs. Snow's to-morrow morning to help her, and we will have a grand hunt for the mysterious letter; it may turn up yet."

"I hope so, but I don't see how it can, for I have hunted every-where."

The young ladies entered, laughing and talking, and the conversation was dropped.

As agreed, next morning the young ladies were sent over to Mrs. Snow's, and Harry and his mother began a diligent search for the missing letter.

"I am sure I put it in my trunk in a small olive-wood box, in which I keep your dear father's letters, and I am sure it was there when we were at the Land View Hotel, but I do not remember seeing it since." She opened the trunk and took out a small olive-wood box. "See, here is the box, and here are your father's letters, but Mr. Constant's letter is gone."

"Perhaps it is mixed in with father's letters?"

"So I thought, but I have examined them all carefully and have not found it; however, you had better look, also. No one has touched those letters, my son, but myself, since your father died."

Harry examined the letters sadly and tenderly, but Mr. Constant's letter was not among them.

"I have examined my trunk, and every article in it carefully, but could not find the letter; but you had better do so, also, and I hope you will be more successful."

Harry examined and took out every article in the trunk ; he examined them carefully and minutely ; then he examined all the nooks and corners of the trunk, but could not find the letter. He began to think, as his mother already thought, the task hopeless.

"It is very strange," he said, after his mother had repacked her trunk ; but he said, laughing : "As it is not in your trunk, perhaps it is in my trunk. Didn't you have the clothes out of my trunk one day the same time you had your clothes out of your trunk ? I think I remember that you did."

"And if I did, how could that letter possibly get out of this box into your clothes ?"

"I can't give you any reasonable idea of why it should, I am sure ; but as we don't know of any other place to hunt, suppose we look through my clothes."

He opened his trunk and lifted out the tray. The first article under the tray was a black cloth coat. He put his hand into the coat-tail pocket and pulled out a pair of light kid gloves.

"The gloves I wore to the last sociable in Jersey City," he said, as he put them back. He put his hand into the breast-pocket.

"Halloo, here it is !" he exclaimed, as he drew out a small, white letter, sealed with red wax. "It's addressed to Grace Constant, too," he said, reading the directions.

"I'm so thankful," said Mrs. Noble, sinking down on a chair with a sigh of relief.

"But how in the world did it get into my coat pocket!" exclaimed Harry. "That's the mystery to me."

"How could I be so stupid! how could I be so forgetful!" exclaimed Mrs. Noble, jumping up excitedly from her chair.

"I remember all about it now, Harry. I did it myself; I will explain. The day on which you saw me have the clothes out of our trunks at the same time I opened the olive-wood box, and thought I would read some of your father's letters, which are so precious to me. When I opened it Grace's letter was on top. Your coat was lying on a chair beside me. I thought this important letter might get lost or mislaid while I was reading, so, for safety for a few minutes, I thought I would just stick it in your coat pocket. How I could do so thoughtless a thing I do not know. I put it in your pocket, and soon became absorbed in your father's letters, so much so, that it was nearly tea-time before I was aware of it; and being mortified, and fearing tea would be delayed on my account, I hastily put the letters back in the box and the clothes in the trunks, and from that time until now I have not remembered putting the letter in your pocket."

"And so you are the thief," said Harry, laughing.

"Yes, I am; and I hope I shall never do any thing so absurd again."

"Never mind, mother. 'All's well that ends well.'"

Mrs. Noble speedily began to regain her health and spirits after the letter was found, and the look of perplexity and care disappeared from her countenance.

Harry continued to work diligently on the land, and before the month of May was ended he had several acres of land, on each claim, plowed, and had planted in corn, potatoes, and beans, these being the favorites for planting on the sod in his neighborhood.

CHAPTER IX.

The pleasant spring-time—Peter Bigman's arrival at Nobleton—Locates a cattle ranch near Nobleton—Perjury and profanity in Dakota—Peter Bigman's sickness—Recovery—Pat Brislin.

TOWARD the end of May the green grass began to appear among the dry grass of the last season, and delicate prairie flowers began to adorn the prairie with their beautiful colors. The weather became quite warm; sometimes, indeed, quite hot. On pleasant, balmy spring mornings the ladies loved to wander over the prairie, gathering flowers, enjoying the delicious air, and listening to the sweet songs of the multitude of wild birds, who had not yet learned to fear man, and would scarcely fly away at their approach. Plovers ran along before them as they walked, almost as tame as chickens. How beautiful nature seemed putting on her spring dress, as a young bride. How free and happy the Nobles were, away from the turmoils of life; away from the sharp competitions and contrasts of the busy, bustling, self-seeking multitude. God seemed nearer, and the instinct to look up to him and trust in him was much stronger than when surrounded by the works of man. The works of God revive, restore, invigorate; such, we fear, cannot always be said of the works of man.

"I think I will walk over to Mrs. Snow's this morning," said Grace, one pleasant morning, "and see if I cannot help her with her work."

"Do so, Grace," said Mrs. Noble. "Minnie and I are both busy this morning. Poor Mrs. Snow! she must have all and more than she can do with all those children to care for."

"Yes, indeed, I really do not see how she does get along; I will take some cake with me for the little darlings."

"I believe I will take a rest from plowing for an hour or two, and walk over with you," said Harry.

"I am glad to have company, and I am sure Jack and Tom will be pleased to see you."

In the close association into which the whole family were necessarily thrown, Grace and Harry seldom enjoyed the society of each other alone. This morning they started out at the usual gait, but before they got to the lake Harry stooped to pick some flowers for Grace; after that their walk seemed to become slower and slower, stooping often to pick flowers, sometimes conversing about common things, sometimes scarcely speaking for minutes together. So they passed the lake and over the prairie to Mrs. Snow's, treading on the grass and flowers, the balmy spring air softly fanning their cheeks, and their hearts beating in unison in a sweet, deep, but unacknowledged love. How the delicious moments fly! How sweet "Love's young dream!" It is an oasis of the

heart, a joy that leaves its impress on the soul forever. In some of those blissful intervals of silence, is it to be wondered that Harry's mind looked into the vista of a golden future? His imagination pictured a beautiful mansion, surrounded by a garden and groves of beautiful trees, where now stood the modest scarlet-colored claim shanties; from the broad piazza the happy family would stand and look upon fields of waving grain and herds of lowing cattle. A pier would be built on the lake, and little, bright-colored boats await the pleasure of the owner; and, perhaps, a little white-winged yacht would dance upon its ripples; and who would be there to enjoy all this beauty—this realization of their most sanguine dreams? Mother? Yes. Minnie? Yes. Grace? Yes. But might not Grace then be more than Grace now to him? O blissful thought! O happy possibility!

And how did Grace feel? There was a glow about her heart, a sense of peace and satisfaction, a joy that she did not analyze, happily enjoying its presence without questioning, or even thinking whence it came or why it was there; she only knew that she was very happy. Slowly and happily they walked along until they arrived at Mrs. Snow's. Mrs. Snow was delighted to see them, and gladly accepted Grace's offer to assist her awhile with her household work. The children were pleased to see them, also; and seeing Grace assisting their mother, they took possession of Harry and took him out to see the new cow and chick-

ens. Mrs. Snow insisted upon their staying to dinner, but they declined, Grace thinking it would be an abuse of hospitality to add to Mrs. Snow's work by accepting her kind invitation. As they approached Nobleton they observed a saddle-horse hitched to the horse-post in front of Mrs. Noble's house.

"Mother must have a caller," said Harry.

"I wonder who it can be?" said Grace.

"I don't know, unless it is a claim hunter."

Arrived at the door, Grace hesitated and even took a step backward in unspeakable amazement.

Harry, who was close behind her, seemed thunder-struck, and a look of most unpleasant surprise displayed itself upon his countenance, as he looked upon the new-comer. But Grace's sense of hospitality and politeness enabled her to overcome her feelings in a moment, and she advanced with outstretched hands, saying, "Mr. Bigman. Is it possible it can be you, in Dakota?"

Harry also controlled his features and came forward and shook hands with him.

"I do not wonder that you are all very much surprised at seeing me in Dakota," said Peter Bigman, as they all seated themselves, "but the fact is that my health became poor this spring, and the doctor said, office work was too confining for me; he said if I continued it much longer my health might completely break down. As I had saved some money, my parents advised me to resign, which I did, re-

luctantly, and have come to Dakota to re-establish my health."

"Do you expect to take up land?" Harry politely inquired.

"Yes, that is my intention; I wish to go into stock-raising, also. I think that more profitable than farming."

"Have you located yet?"

"No, but I like the looks of the land in this vicinity better than any I have seen, and if I can find some suitable land I will locate near here."

The whole family struggled to conceal a look of dismay at the prospect of having so unpleasant a neighbor.

As dinner was ready, Mrs. Noble politely invited Peter Bigman to remain to dinner. He at once accepted the invitation, and during that meal endeavored to make himself very agreeable, relating the news from the East, giving information about personal friends, and telling Harry the latest office gossip. The news was very acceptable to the family, and the dislike to the bearer was to some extent forgotten on account of the tidings he brought.

After dinner Harry took him out to see the improvements which they had made, and Peter Bigman expressed himself greatly pleased with the soil, the location, and the improvements. He also asked Harry many questions about the land in the vicinity.

"I shall make every effort to locate near you," he

said to Harry, as he mounted his horse and rode toward Land View.

When Harry returned to the house he found all the ladies sitting and discussing the remarkable advent of Peter Bigman.

"What in the wide, wide world made him come to Dakota? Of all the people I should have thought would come here, he is the last," said Minnie, tapping the floor vigorously with her foot.

"Why, he says he is sick," said Mrs. Noble.

"Yes; that's what he says," says Harry, sitting down on the door-step; "but I always used to look back of his words, when I was in the office, for they often concealed a hidden motive."

"I noticed that his hand was cold and clammy, when I shook it," said Mrs. Noble.

"Ugh! How I do hate to touch a clammy hand," said Minnie, shuddering.

"His hands have been cold and clammy ever since I knew him," said Harry.

"Well, if he must come to Dakota, I wish he would settle several hundred miles from here," said Minnie.

"So do I," said Harry, "but there's no such good luck." Puck had come up to him to be petted, and in the energy of his expression he gave his ear a pull which made him run away, howling.

"Poor Puck; come back, Puck!" he called, "I did not intend to hurt you."

Puck came back wagging his tail.

"How he could have the impudence to come and settle near us after he treated you so meanly in the office is more than I can see," said Minnie, indignantly.

"He is the cheekiest and most conceited puppy I ever met," said Harry, jumping up, very red in the face, as he recollected what he had endured in days not long gone by.

"My son, you forget yourself," said Mrs. Noble, quietly.

"No wonder," he replied, looking down and rubbing the carpet with his foot.

"How are we going to treat him decently if he settles near us?" said Minnie.

"We must do so," said Mrs. Noble; "we should be poor Christians, indeed, if we did not treat kindly those whom we disliked, even for good cause."

The next day Peter Bigman came over to Nobleton accompanied by a land agent.

Harry went to the door.

"Good-day, Harry!" said he, very pleasantly.

"Good-day!" Harry replied.

"Are you all well to-day?"

"All very well, thank you."

"This land agent has come over from Land View with me to show me two adjoining quarter sections which have been taken up, but the claimants wish to sell the relinquishment of their right to them; they

are not far from here; would you mind riding over with us to inspect them?"

"I will ride over with you," Harry replied, very slowly. He went to the stable, got one of the horses, mounted, and the trio started.

The land agent knew Harry, and addressed most of his conversation to him, about land, prospects of the country, etc.

Arrived at the claims, Harry exclaimed: "Why, they are next to Miss Foundit's."

"Very true," said the land agent; "and very good claims they are."

After riding over them, Harry said he thought them very desirable claims.

"The owner wants five hundred dollars for the relinquishment of the two," said the land agent; one is his homestead and the other is his tree claim."

"Has not the land-office at Yankton recently issued an order that relinquishments shall not be sold for more than the actual cost of the improvements made on the claims?" Harry inquired.

"Yes, it has," the land agent replied.

"Well, all the improvements on these claims are a shanty, cost twenty-five dollars, on the homestead, and five acres of plowing, cost twenty dollars; on the tree claims there are six acres of plowing, cost twenty-four dollars; improvements, all told, sixty-nine dollars. Now, the owner of these claims has got to

swear when he takes five hundred dollars that he is receiving only the cost of his improvements."

"Yes; he has got to swear to that," said the agent.

"That is downright perjury."

"Very much like it," the agent replied; "but selling relinquishments of claims in this way is a very common thing out here."

"Then perjury is a very common thing out here."

"Yes; I don't know of any thing more common, unless it is profanity."

Harry looked startled and indignant at the bold frankness of the agent. But bold frankness in sin is quite common on the frontier.

Peter Bigman had listened to the conversation, but did not seem much affected by the low state of morals on the frontier. He said, slowly, looking over the land: "I think this land will suit me; there is a small lake in the corner of one of the claims, which will be very handy to water the cattle at. I think I had rather buy out this claimant's relinquishment than go farther and fare worse; where is the owner? I don't see him about his shanty."

"O! he has a store in Plankinton, and only comes down here about once a month for a few days. He left his claims in my hands," the agent replied.

"Mr. Bigman," said Harry, speaking very earnestly and soberly, "how can you purchase these relinquishments of this owner, when you know he has got to commit perjury before he can take your money?"

"That's his lookout," Peter Bigman replied with a mean look in his eyes.

"It looks to me that your purchasing the relinquishments of him, in this way, is simply aiding and abetting his perjury."

"O, every body does it out here," broke in the agent, beginning to fear that Harry's scruples would cause him to lose the commissions on the profitable sale.

"Because every body does it, does not make it right, does it?" Harry replied, warmly.

"Every body does it but the *tenderfeet*," said the agent, with a scornful laugh.

"Then consider me a *tenderfoot*," said Harry.

"I think the land will suit me, and I am going to take it," said Peter Bigman, sulkily; "you may make out the papers, and I will go to Yankton and take up the land as soon as possible."

"All right," said the agent; "by this time next week the land will be yours."

They bade Harry good-bye, and rode toward Land View; while Harry rode rapidly to Nobleton.

When Harry related the above conversation to his mother in the evening, he said; "Peter Bigman will do for the frontier very well; he is like a good many church members who come out here to make money, and leave their scruples at home; their motto seems to be, to let nothing interfere with their taking up land."

Peter Bigman succeeded in buying the two quarter sections, or rather their relinquishment, of the man who had located on them. According to law, by so doing, he placed himself in the same position toward the United States government as if he had originally located on them himself, and was required to fulfill all the requirements of the law to obtain a title from the government. He moved into the claim shanty as soon as he returned from Yankton. He built a stable, bought a pair of horses and a plow, and began to plow on his land. He made it convenient to call frequently on the family at Nobleton, and endeavored to make himself very agreeable; but although the family treated him politely, there was a coldness and reserve in their manner toward him which he, with all his egotism, could not help but notice, particularly on the part of Grace, who seldom addressed him, and generally replied to his questions in monosyllables. After he had been located about a week, Harry, being greatly urged by his mother, rode over to call on him. He found Peter Bigman resting on his plow handles, dressed in an old office suit. He received Harry cordially. "I think I have plowed enough for to-day," he said, and began to unhitch the horses.

"How do you like plowing?" Harry inquired.

"Like it!" he exclaimed; "I'm so sore I can hardly move sometimes, and it hurts me to turn in bed at night. It's very different, I can tell you, from writing in an office."

"I know what it is," said Harry, smiling; "but you will get over it soon, and then you will not feel tired and sore after a day's work. Have you met your neighbor, Miss Fanny Foundit?" Harry inquired, when the horses were unhitched.

"No, I have not."

"Very well, suppose you mount one of your horses and I will ride over with you and introduce you."

Peter Bigman consented, and in a few minutes they rode up to Miss Foundit's claim shanty. The doors of the shanty was open, and Miss Foundit was sitting inside knitting. There was but little furniture in the shanty, but every thing looked neat, clean, and orderly. Miss Foundit was dressed in a light pink calico dress. She arose as the gentlemen rode up, and received them effusively.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Noble; ever so glad to see you; will you and your friend dismount and come in?"

After they had dismounted and tied their horses, they entered the shanty, and Harry introduced Peter Bigman as her next neighbor.

"Very glad to meet you, Mr. Bigman; are you going to live on your claim all the time?"

"I expect to do some farming, and raise cattle, also. I expect to make my time in the West count; so I propose to do three things at once—take up land, farm it, and raise cattle."

"Hope you will succeed, I'm sure. Glad you're

going to be on your claim all the time; it will seem neighborly, as you are only a quarter of a mile away. The man who had that claim before you was only here two or three days a month, and it made me feel more lonely than ever to look at his empty shanty. How are your mother, Minnie, and Grace?" turning to Harry.

"Right well, I thank you."

"I have not been over there since yesterday," smiling; "and it seems a long time since I have had any body to talk to."

"You have had a little experience in taking up a claim, Miss Foundit; how do you like it?" Peter Bigman inquired.

"To tell the truth, it's awful lonesome sometimes; but," firing up, "I'd a great sight rather do it than teach school or be pestered continually with my brother's and sister's young 'uns."

"It will not be many months," said Harry, coaxingly, "until you prove upon your claim; then you can live on it, or not, as you please. In the meantime we are always glad to see you at Nobleton."

"I think your mother the finest woman and most real lady I ever met, and I like the girls, too. It does not take very pressing invitations to make me visit you often."

After a little desultory conversation the gentlemen left, Miss Foundit giving them an urgent invitation to call again.

Dakota is healthy, the air is pure and exhilarating, and many debilitated and sick people recover health here; but it is not free from the ailments of mankind, and people get sick and die here as well as elsewhere. Peter Bigman became sick. The change from a comfortable home, and the care of a doting mother, to the discomforts of a claim shanty; his poor cooking, and a severe cold taken by being caught in a severe thunder-storm, caused him to become very sick, and ended in a fever. Seldom a day had passed but he made some excuse for calling on the family at Nobleton. For several days he had complained of feeling sick, and of having a bad cold. Mrs. Noble kindly suggested, and gave him several domestic remedies, but he did not seem to improve. One day he did not come at all, nor the next. Mrs. Noble sent Harry over to see whether he was sick or gone to Land View on business. Harry found him tossing about in his rude bunk, in a fever. He was very glad to see Harry, and asked him to get him some fresh drinking water. Harry asked him if should get a doctor from Land View. He consented, and Harry started for a doctor. He called on Fanny Foundit first, however, and informed her that her neighbor was very sick.

"I'm very sorry," she said; "he seems like a very nice young man; I'll go right over and see what I can do for him."

When Harry returned with the doctor he found

Miss Foundit installed as nurse, and the shanty had a much more tidy appearance as the result of her presence. The doctor told Harry that Peter Bigman was quite sick and likely to continue so for some time; that he would require good nursing, or his sickness might result fatally. Mrs. Noble, Fanny Foundit, and Harry became his nurses; but Miss Foundit assumed control of the shanty and the greater burden of the nursing. Sometimes he became delirious and he talked of the office in Jersey City; gave orders and domineered over his clerks; talked of his mother; often talked of the Nobles, and much of Grace. Sometimes he thought he was master of an immense ranch, had thousands of cattle, and had grown very rich; then that he had returned East and made a display of his riches, spending money lavishly—something he never would have done in his lucid moments. The crisis passed safely, he began to recover rapidly, and was soon convalescent; then Mrs. Noble and Harry were not at his shanty so much, but Fanny Foundit was unceasing in her attentions, making such palatable things as her resources would admit, to tempt his appetite, endeavoring to amuse him, and keeping his shanty and clothing in order; playing the part of elder sister, making herself indispensable, and putting him under great obligations. But these kind services were only received with a semi-surly recognition; indeed, Peter Bigman received all the kind attentions rendered,

at considerable sacrifice and inconvenience, with a matter-of-course air, which seemed to imply, "I am entitled to these attentions, and it is your duty to give them;" and though he went through the form of thanking them all, there was a lack of heartiness and real thankfulness about it that caused a chilliness of their hearts; that is, Mrs. Noble's and Harry's. Fanny Foundit did not seem to notice it, but she only saw superficially, and had had no dealings with him in the past.

Peter soon recovered his usual health after he became convalescent. He then went away for several days to purchase cattle to start his ranch.

When he returned he soon found that, although he had not many cattle to attend to, he could not do much plowing without some help.

One day an Irishman came to his shanty; he evidently had not been a great while in the country.

"Can ye till me of inny body in this naberhood as would like till hire a hand?"

"What can you do?"

"Farm, tind cattle, or any thing that's wantin' dun."

"What wages do you want?"

"Whatever pay's a goin'—eighteen dollars a munth, I think."

"Where have you been?"

"Sure, I'm preempin a quarter secshin a few moiles beyant here, and I'd want till be away from

me job a day or two onct in a whoile till kape me risidence strate wid the government."

"You have not been in the country long, have you?"

"No; sure I'm a granehorn; but I've been in the counthry long enough till declare me intintions till become a citizen, an' that's all that's nicissary till take up land."

"Easier than to get land in Ireland, isn't it?"

"Indade it is; sorra a fut you'd git in Oireland if ye lived on it till ye was as ould as Methusalem. Blast the English guvernement."

"Then you are a Fenian?"

"Shure I'm any thin' till bate John Bull out of Oireland."

"Have you a family?"

"Sorra a woife or child."

"Well, I think I will try you for a month. When will you come?"

"At wanst. I've had no dinner, shure."

"Very well. I will give you some dinner, and after dinner I'll drive to Land View and get some boards to build you a shanty. You can take care of the cattle while I am away."

Pat Brislin made a very good farm hand; he was smart, active, and industrious, and his native wit sometimes drove the scowl from his employer's face.

But although Pat worked faithfully for his new master, he never learned to like him much; his self-

importance and the habitual scowl on his face turned Pat against him. One day when he was at Nobleton doing an errand, and Harry asked him how he liked his new place and his work, he answered :

“Faix, the work’s all right, an’ the place is not bad, but the masther, phwat’s the mather wid him I don’t know ; the disagreeable looks of him I don’t loike. He looks often as if he had been atin’ somethin’ sour, or somethin’ that had turned on his stum-muck.”

CHAPTER X.

Fourth of July on the frontier—Patriotism, races, etc.—Peter Dick jumps Harry Noble's claim—Harry Noble elected delegate to the Constitutional Convention—Peter Bigman induces Peter Dick to leave Harry Noble's claim—Peter Bigman increasing in favor at Nobleton.

“**H**ALLOO, Min!” Harry called out, as he drove up to the door of the house on his return from Land View to purchase some groceries on the second of July.

“What is it?” Minnie answered, running to the door.

“O, I just wanted to tell you that day after tomorrow is the Fourth of July, and they are going to have a big county celebration at Land View, and have invited us all and our neighbors to come up and help celebrate; they have taken up a collection, and have sixty dollars toward it. There's going to be lots of fun.”

“Guess we'll have to go, wont we?” she inquired, turning to Mrs. Noble and Grace, who had come to the door to hear the news.

“I'm afraid the crowd will be so promiscuous that we would not enjoy ourselves,” Mrs. Noble said, hesitatingly.

“It will not do to be too reserved, mother,” said

Harry, "or people will think we consider ourselves too much above them, and as every body seems to be going, our absence will be remarked upon."

"If you think that will be the result, Harry, I suppose we had better go," Mrs. Noble replied.

It rained during the night of the third of July, and the morning of the fourth dawned cloudy and gloomy. The citizens of Land View thought their celebration was going to be a failure, but postponed it until afternoon, hoping there would be a change in the weather; nor were they disappointed, for about noon it cleared up, the sun came out, and the afternoon was delightful. The neighboring settlers began to come in rapidly in their wagons; loads of men, women, and children; all bent on celebrating the glorious Fourth. Among the arrivals were Mrs. Snow and her children, a jolly wagon load, packed in with the family from Nobleton; Miss Foundit and Peter Bigman, driven over by Pat Brislin.

The patriotic part of the celebration was held in an unfinished store. A rude platform was erected at one end, on which the singers, readers, and others taking part in the celebration were seated. There was a melodeon on the platform and a cornet-player. The platform was adorned with the American flag. Seats of rough boards were provided for the audience. It was an audience of promiscuous nationality—Americans, Russians, Irish, Hollanders—how many more I know not. All were clad in their holi-

day attire. The Americans were the best dressed; indeed, they were dressed in a style which, as to quality and good taste, you would not expect to see on the frontier, indicating the possession of some means and some cultivation. The speeches and music were listened to attentively, and with much appreciation; the applause was long and frequent. The Americans doubtless enjoyed the occasion from patriotic motives, and the foreigners from curiosity, and probably with much pleasure, too, as an outward expression of the citizens of their adopted country of their love for the freedom which they enjoyed, and which they so willingly shared with the oppressed of all nations.

The programme was well arranged.

First there was a prayer, offered by a minister who was homesteading a claim. Then a song by the Land View glee club—a patriotic song, much applauded. Then a young lady, dressed in a light-blue lawn, stepped forward, courtesying, book in hand, and read the immortal “Declaration of Independence,” in a strong, clear voice; she was greatly applauded. Then a public speaker from the town of Scotland, Dakota, delivered the speech of the day. He reviewed the historical part of the subject, and explained why the colonists were driven to revolution by the oppressive acts of the mother country; which, doubtless, was very instructive to the foreign portion of his audience. His speech was a good one, very patriotic and

loudly applauded. After the speech a little girl, with long brown curls and dressed in pink-and-white muslin, sang a little patriotic song, and looked frightened at the loud applause, when she had finished. Then the resolutions of the convention, recently held at Huron, setting forth why South Dakota should be formed into a State, were read by a Land View lawyer. Then a patriotic song was sung by the glee club, accompanied by the organ and cornet. After this it was announced, by the chairman, that this song concluded the indoor entertainment, and that the celebration would be continued outside, by games, races, etc.

Outside, a number of booths had been erected for the sale of lemonade, peanuts, hot candy, ice-cream, and refreshments of that kind. And be it here recorded, to the everlasting credit of the county commissioners, that no beer, spirits, or any intoxicating drink of any kind were publicly sold anywhere in the county; for this brave trio of true citizens of Douglas County refused to grant a single license in the county; consequently there were no saloons, and all liquors, if sold at all, must be sold secretly and in defiance of law.

Mrs. Noble, Grace, and Minnie informed Harry that they did not care to witness the outdoor games, and would sit in the hotel until they were over. He accompanied them, with Mrs. Snow and the two youngest children, to the hotel, and returned to witness the outdoor celebration with the others.

Fanny Foundit observed the ladies going with Harry to the hotel, and told Peter Bigman that she wasn't going to miss any thing, if Mrs. Noble and the girls did; it was too dull living in a claim shanty to miss any thing that was going on.

Peter Bigman scowled at her determination, for he would like to have relieved himself of the pleasure of her company for awhile; but she paid no attention to his looks.

Harry had never witnessed a celebration of this kind, and as the county generally participated in it, he made up his mind to see how these celebrations were carried on out West.

First there was a horse-race for a twenty-dollar prize, offered by the committee. The horses were to be raced in pairs. A number of mustang pony teams were entered for the race. They were driven out on the prairie, about half a mile from Land View, accompanied by most of the men and some of the women. One team of newly-broken, little, brown Texas ponies was driven by a very fat man. The competing teams were drawn up in line, and, on the firing of a revolver, started. There they fly over the prairie; the drivers shouting and plying their whips, the mud splashing, and rickety buckboards and shaky, one-seat, open wagons rattling and shaking; the crowd running, cheering, hallooing—

“The spotted team's ahead!”

“No, the black's ahead!”

"Look at Fatty away behind, with his little bay team!"

"Ho! ho! see that team balking over there. Ha! ha! the driver has to give it up and turn away!"

"Look! Fatty's neck and neck with the first team!"

"Yes! but that little team can never win, hauling that big fellow!"

"Yes, they can though. Look! look! he forges ahead. He has reached the line! He wins! Three cheers for Fatty and his mustangs!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!! Hurrah!!!"

The committee, the chairman of which was an iron-worker from Pennsylvania, now a homesteader, very fond of athletic sports, leads the way to the street, and a prize of ten dollars for the best runner in a foot race is offered.

There are no professional runners here, and the young men all hesitate to volunteer. Finally, fearing that part of the programme will have to be abandoned if some one does not step forward, a tall, finely-built young fellow says to his companion: "Tom, I'll run if you will, rather than have the race fall through."

"All right!" says Tom.

They take off their coats, and begin to take off their shoes and stockings. The example is contagious and half a dozen more young men follow their example.

"Toe the mark," says the judge; and the strong, healthy young yeomen stand in line, hats off, in shirt sleeves, bare-footed, elbows bent, fists clenched,

cheeks red with excitement, eyes bright and looking straight forward, ready to spring. The citizens of the county, male, female, large and small, are stretched along the hundred-yard course, mostly at the ends; the few unpainted frame houses of Land View, the sun shining brightly in the blue sky, the rolling green prairie spreading away in every direction. It is a picture.

“Ready!”

Crack! goes the revolver.

“They’re off!”

The crowd runs after them, encouraging their favorites. Now, one is ahead; now, another; now, one stops exhausted. A loud cheer. The winner has reached the line. The people crowd around the panting runners, laughing, commenting, criticising, all in the greatest good humor.

Now for the potato race; there are five competitors. The judge draws a line across the street; each one has a place assigned him on the line, at equal distances from each other. Each one puts his hat down on the ground beside him, on the line. The judge takes nine good-sized potatoes in his hands; goes to the place of the first man in the line; he takes a long pace in front of him, and stooping, lays a potato on the ground, then another pace and lays another down, and so on until he has the nine laid down a pace apart. Then he lays nine down in front of the second man, and so on until all the competitors have each

nine potatoes laid down in front of them, a pace apart. The competitors and the crowd watch the judge intently while he lays the potatoes down, laughing and joking in high good humor. The game is a simple one: each competitor must run to his first potato, pick it up, run back to his starting place and put it in his hat; then run for the second potato, run back and put it in his hat, and so on until he has the nine potatoes in his hat. The one who gets the nine potatoes in his hat first is the winner.

One of the competitors is a boy about twelve years old; the interest of the crowd seems to center on him.

At the word from the judge, they all start for their first potato. It is great fun to see the eager haste with which they run, stoop, turn, run back and put the potatoes in their hats; they could hardly be more in earnest were the potatoes made of gold. Some of them are much quicker than others, and the potatoes accumulate in their hats much faster. The boy is at the end of the line. The crowd wants him to win, but he lags behind. While his back is turned, they slyly kick his potatoes nearer the line. He seems surprised at the shortness of the distance, but picks them up and gains on the others. Only one is ahead—he wins.

The boy is second.

“Hurrah for the boy!” cries one of his sly helpers, laughing. The crowd gives the cheer, laughing, for they have seen what was going on and take it as a joke.

Some of the competitors see it, too, and while they complain of unfairness, they smile.

The sun is beginning to get rather low now, and there is a pretty general movement toward the wagons, and wagon-load after wagon-load of jolly, laughing settlers drive off, often calling to each other; "We've had a good old-fashioned Fourth of July celebration, haven't we?"

The Nobleton family started for home at this time. After supper, when it became dusk, they could see the rockets from Land View shooting up into the blue, starry sky, with their fiery trail of light and graceful curves.

"Well, we've had a pretty good Fourth of July, for Dakota, haven't we?" said Harry to his mother.

"Yes, Harry, but I hardly think I can approve of some of those outdoor sports."

Harry heard afterward that some "enterprising fellow" had hired an unfurnished store, engaged a fiddler, and had a dance, charging ten cents a couple for each dance.

Some one had smuggled liquor to this dance, and some of the young men got drunk; it ended in a row; so, despite all the good citizens could do, "Satan appeared also."

On the fifth of July Peter Bigman was plowing on his claim with Pat Brislin; he drove the horses and Pat held the plow; it was drawing toward noon, and they were both getting pretty tired and

hungry. A stranger approached them, walking over the prairie. He was poorly dressed, and was evidently a laboring man; he had a sinister countenance. Seeing that he wished to speak to them, Peter Bigman stopped the plow.

"Good-day, sir! I'm hunting land around here; my name is Peter Dick. I've come from Indiana to get me a good piece of government land; I thought you might be able to tell me where I can get a good claim?"

"The good land is pretty generally taken up around here," Peter Bigman replied.

"I'm bound to have a piece of good land. I haven't come all the way from Indiana to be stuck on a piece of poor land."

"Sure yer rather late a cummin'; if ye wanted the pick, ye should have come sooner; now ye'll take phwat's lift and be thankful there's any lavins at all, at all," said Pat Brislin.

"No, I'll not; I'm bound to have a good piece of land!"

He then began to make inquiries of Peter Bigman about the climate, soil, water, and various other matters pertaining to Dakota.

"Faix! by the looks iv the sun, it's dinner toime," said Pat Brislin, almost blinding himself looking up at the sun. "An' by that same token I could almost ate the handles iv the plow, I'm that hungry. Healthy here, is it? Is that phwat yer aftler askin'?"

Sure yer loikely till work yer jaws till death till kape yoursilf from starvin' intirely."

Peter Bigman, much against his will, was obliged to ask Peter Dick to dinner. It was the custom of the country to entertain whoever came along, and he did not wish to obtain an ill reputation among his neighbors by refusing hospitality to this ill-looking stranger. The stranger accepted the invitation at once, and accompanied Peter Bigman to his shanty, notwithstanding his host had such a gloomy look on his face.

Pat Brislin put the horses in the stable, and went to his lonely dinner in his own shanty.

While they were eating their meager dinner Peter Dick continued to ask questions about Dakota and the land laws, and frequently used the expression, that he was bound to have a good piece of land in that neighborhood, by fair means or foul.

Peter Bigman listened to him gloomily for a long time, answering his questions as shortly as possible, and appearing absent minded; but after Peter Dick had used the expression several times, about getting a good piece of land by fair means or foul, he suddenly brightened up in his manner, and acted and spoke as though he had decided upon a course of action. His treatment of the stranger underwent an entire change; he exerted himself to entertain him; gave him all the information he could about Dakota; told him he would like to see him get a good piece

of land in that neighborhood, "But," he said, "I don't see how you can when it is all taken."

"Aint there any way I can slip on to a quarter section; I'm not very particular about how it is done?"

"The only way I know is to jump a claim, but that is risky."

"O! I'm willing to take the risk. Can you tell me of a good quarter section I'd have any chance of getting in that way?"

"I really don't know, let me think a minute; the best land in this neighborhood is owned by the Noble family, Mrs. Noble, her son, and daughter have six quarter sections, three preemption rights, and three tree claims. They have so much, that the papers may not be drawn up right, or something, and they might not be able to hold it all, in a contest; but they are friends of mine," he said, looking furtively at Peter Dick, a double meaning in his eye, "and I would not like any one to interfere with them."

"Yes, I see," said Peter Dick, returning his expressive look, and winking; "you wouldn't want a stranger to jump your friends' claim?"

"No; certainly not."

After dinner Peter Bigman went out to resume his plowing, Pat Brislin having hitched the horses to the plow. Peter Dick watched the plowing for awhile, Peter Bigman addressing him pleasantly every time they passed him. Pat Brislin noticed the change in

his master's manner toward this ill-looking stranger, and wondered at it.

In a short time Peter Dick said :

"I think I'll be going now, Mr. Bigman ; can you tell me where the Nobles' claims are?"

"O, yes ; there are three red houses together, but wait till we finish this furrow and I'll walk a short distance with you, and point them out to you."

"Sure, there's a moighty change in the masther till that ill-looking vagabone ; plwat can be the manin' uv it?" Pat Brislin remarked to himself, as they walked away, leaving him plowing alone.

Peter Bigman was playing a double part ; and why? Why was he here at all? His coming to Dakota for his health was a subterfuge ; he would never have come if he had not a more powerful motive. What was it? He was madly in love with Grace Constant. He would not take "no" for an answer. With the dogged persistence of his nature he was determined to have her at any cost ; so he had followed the Nobles out here. Arrived in Dakota, he was envious at their doing so well—at their possessing so much land. He made no progress in his suit. He was received and treated kindly, but the relations were not intimate. Grace treated him coldly, and he never succeeded in seeing her alone, although he called often. All this was bitterness to him ; there was no hope, and in the monotonous way in which things were moving along he could see

no chance of improvement. It maddened him—made him desperate.

When this evil-minded stranger said he would have land by fair means or foul, it occurred to him that if he could get the Nobles into trouble, something might arise out of the situation that would help his cause. Any thing was better than this dead calm of events; at any rate, his malicious envy would be gratified. So he directed Peter Dick to the Nobles' land as a proper subject for his sinister intentions.

Two days afterward, while Harry was plowing, he saw a team driving at some distance; it was loaded with something that looked like a big box. It stopped at the end of his claim farthest from him, and he saw a small claim shanty unloaded from it on to his land. The team drove away, but a man remained and began digging near the shanty. Harry was much surprised and perplexed.

"Can it be possible that any man is mean enough to jump my claim?" he thought.

He mounted one of his horses and rode rapidly over to the shanty. The man did not stop digging, or notice him, as he rode up rapidly.

"Halloo, stranger!" he said, "I think you have made a mistake; this is not government land, I have taken this claim."

"You think you have, but you haven't," said Peter Dick, stopping digging; "you haven't complied with

the law, so I've homesteaded it, built me a house on it, and am improving it."

He spoke with an audacious impudence that made Harry very angry.

"What is your name?" Harry demanded, in a loud voice, and with a very red face.

"Peter Dick; if it is any accommodation for you to know."

"So you are going to contest my claim?"

"Looks like it, don't it? Guess I've as much right to government land as you have."

"I have taken up the land according to law, and I'll make it hot for you at Yankton."

"All right, I can take my own part; make it hot for me at the land-office if you can, but if you try and make it hot for me here I can take care of myself," reaching his hand behind him with an expressive gesture. Harry saw the handle of a revolver sticking out of his hip pocket. Harry had his revolver in his hip pocket, and his first mad impulse was to pull it out and fight it out with Peter Dick then and there; but the thought of his mother and the girls rushed into his mind, and he restrained himself.

"You will lose time, money, and labor by this operation," he said, more coolly.

"That's my business! Think I know what I am about."

Harry rode slowly up to his mother's house, but as

he passed Peter Dick's shanty he noticed there was a stove in it, a bunk bed, a rude table, and a bench.

Peter Dick chuckled as Harry rode away, and said to himself: "My, how mad that young rooster was; but the revolver fetched him."

Harry rode up to his mother's house, dismounted, and entered. His mother and the girls were all sitting quietly conversing and sewing. They all looked up as he entered. His mother was startled at his angry looks and red face.

"Why, Harry!" she exclaimed, "what is the matter?"

"Come to the door," he said, "and I will show you."

Mrs. Noble hurried to the door, followed by the young ladies.

"Look over there, mother," pointing, "see that new shanty on my claim."

"Yes; what does it mean?"

"A man named Peter Dick has jumped it!"

"Jumped your claim, my son!" raising her hands in astonishment.

"The mean thing!" exclaimed Minnie, looking very excited.

"O, Harry!" cried Grace, looking pale and sympathizing.

"But, Harry," said Mrs. Noble, recovering her equanimity in a few moments, "he cannot take your claim, can he?"

"O, no! I have complied with the law; he is an ignorant fellow, or he would not have attempted it; but I may have some trouble in getting him off."

While they were talking, Peter Bigman rode up.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed, seeing how excited and distressed they all looked.

"See that new claim shanty over there?" said Harry, pointing to it.

"Yes."

"A man has just jumped my claim, and that is his shanty."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Peter Bigman, simulating astonishment.

"Do you think he can hold it?" inquired Grace of him.

"No, certainly not!" replying to her with great energy; "he is a big fool to have attempted it."

"But he can put me to a great deal of trouble and expense," said Harry.

"If I can be of any assistance to you, I shall be glad to help you all I can," said Peter Bigman, with great earnestness.

The kindly opinion of the Noble family of Peter Bigman was advanced several degrees by this friendly offer.

"I will ride up to Land View and consult with the land agent there, who located me, as to what is best to be done, and if you wish you may remain with the

ladies until I return. It will not be pleasant for them to remain alone with that ill-natured fellow in the vicinity," said Harry.

Thus Peter Bigman took the first step toward ingratiating himself into the favor of the Noble family.

The ladies exerted themselves to entertain him until Harry returned. Grace was kind and complaisant, and Peter Bigman chuckled inwardly at the early success of his scheme to put himself on a friendly footing with the family. Harry did not return until after tea; so Peter Bigman took tea with them. He exerted himself to be pleasant, drove the frown from his brow, and played the part of protector very well.

Harry returned in the evening; all were eager to hear the result of his mission. He said: "I had a long interview with the land agent, who is also a land attorney. He is a clever fellow, and was very indignant at Peter Dick for his ignorance and presumption. 'Why,' he said, 'the mean fellow has not a foot to stand on.' After talking it all over, he said, 'Keep cool about it and let the fellow alone. When he begins to inquire into it he will find that he has gone to expense and trouble for nothing. In the mean time I will talk with some of the settlers about it, and I think he will find popular opinion so strong against jumping a claim that a man has honestly taken, that he will find this part of the country not pleasant to have his residence in.'"

"I hope he wont stay here long," said Minnie. "I don't like to have such a mean fellow around."

"I don't believe he will," said Peter Bigman, "when he finds out he has made a mistake. I will do what I can to get him to move away."

"I heard a piece of news at Land View which interests me greatly," said Harry.

"O, what is it?" exclaimed Minnie.

"It is political, and as such, generally, does not interest ladies; but this comes home to you, and, consequently, you may find it interesting. There is to be a county meeting at Land View, on the ninth of this month, to elect delegates to the Constitutional Convention, to be held at Sioux Falls, to form a Constitution for the proposed new State of Dakota; a number of the citizens requested me to become a candidate as a delegate to the convention, and I have consented."

"O, Harry, you wont go and leave us here alone, will you?" exclaimed Minnie.

"No, Min," said Harry, laughing; "you must remember that I am not elected yet. It does not begin until September, and I thought it would be a nice trip for us all."

"But can we leave the claims so long?"

"I guess so. I think it will only last a week or two."

"I will let Pat Brislin come and sleep in one of your shanties while you are gone, and look after the

live stock," said Peter Bigman. His recent advance in the good graces of the family made him very complaisant.

"Thank you," said Harry. "That will do very nicely; that is, if I am elected," he continued, laughing.

On the ninth Harry went to Land View to the delegate election. He found quite a concourse of people from different parts of the country, who had driven there with their farm wagons to decide who should be delegates. The meeting was commenced in an unfinished building, but it was so hot that it was adjourned to the shady side, outside. There were a number of candidates for election, but Harry found himself popular, and was elected one of the delegates by a large majority. This was done largely through the influence of his acquaintances in Land View, who were extensively acquainted with the new settlers.

It was a great compliment to our young Dakotian to be elected, thus early in the Territory, to so important a convention. The short time he had resided there would hardly seem to warrant it; but, then, it was a new country.

Peter Dick also attended the election. He had come to Land View to consult a land attorney to see if he could not oust Harry Noble from his claim. Harry saw him in the crowd, and pointed him out to his land agent. The agent went around among his

acquaintances and pointed Peter Dick out "as the man who had jumped Harry Noble's (the newly elected delegate) claim, on which he had made a *bona fide* settlement, and was now living on."

The settlers in a new country do not readily tolerate claim-jumping, even where there is a show of justice on the part of the jumper; where there is none, the jumper becomes a very obnoxious member of the community, and is often expelled with violence. Frontier people have a notoriety for taking the law into their own hands.

The result was that Peter Dick was coldly and uncivilly treated, and received many dark looks. He could not but notice all this, and was not slow in divining the cause. After the election he went to the office of a land attorney and told him he had jumped Harry Noble's claim, and wanted him to help him through with it.

"I'll pay you well for your trouble," he said.

The lawyer listened patiently until he got through; then he said to him:

"So you are the fellow that jumped Harry Noble's claim; I've heard about you several times to day. I may as well tell you, if you have not noticed it, that you are a very unpopular man here just now. I came to this country to make money, but I can't identify myself with your case, for I know that Harry Noble is a fine fellow, and that he has complied with the law. He is a popular fellow, as his

election to-day shows. Now, if I were to take your case I would become almost as unpopular as you are, and lose business; so I must decline; but I will give you a piece of advice gratis. Get off that claim, shanty and all, as fast as you have muscle to do it, for if the settlers around here get right mad they might run you out of the country."

"I'll not do it," said Peter Dick, with angry stubbornness. "I've as good a right to a good piece of land as any other man, and I am going to stick it out on this claim."

"Very well, sir," said the lawyer, concluding the interview; "remember, I've given you a fair warning."

Peter Dick went back to his shanty in no enviable state of mind. He would have gotten drunk before he went back if he could; but there was no place in Land View where he could buy the liquor to do it.

Harry Noble went home that day in an exhilarated state of mind.

"Elected member to a Constitutional Convention," he thought; "to meet with the best men of southern Dakota to frame a Constitution that may be the bulwark of the new State for many years. Can it be possible that I have so easily attained so great an honor! Could it ever have been possible had I remained a toiling clerk in the railroad company's office in New York. Truly the opportunities of a new country are wonderful."

When he arrived at home they saw by his happy face that he was elected.

"O, I'm so glad!" cried Minnie.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Delegate," said Grace, her face beaming with smiles.

"My dear son," said his mother, kissing him, "I begin to feel that I am being amply and rapidly repaid for braving frontier life and coming to Dakota. I now realize there are opportunities here that would be un hoped for you in a crowded city; manly, honorable opportunities. I am well pleased."

The next day Peter Dick called on Peter Bigman and angrily accused him of getting him into trouble.

"I never told you to jump Harry Noble's land, did I?" said Peter Bigman.

"Not in words, but you made me believe, by your mean, sly looks, there was a chance for me."

Peter Bigman began to be frightened; he was afraid the Nobles might hear that he had encouraged Peter Dick to do the jumping, so he thought best to conciliate him.

"I deny I had any thing to do with the jumping," he said; "but I am sorry for you all the same, and I will try and help you out of the fix you are in; so keep quiet and cool, and come back to-morrow evening."

"All right," said Peter Dick, gruffly, and went back to his shanty. He was beginning to get a little frightened as he thought over the lawyer's advice.

The next day Peter Bigman went to Land View

to a land agent, and asked him if he knew of a quarter section in another part of the county which could be had cheaply. The land agent knew of a soldier's declaration to a quarter section, the allotted time of which would run out that week, and could be had for \$25; that is, he would tell him where the land was for \$25, and when the time ran out, he or any friend of his could settle on it as a preemption or homestead claim.

"All right," said Peter Bigman. "Here are the \$25. I'll send you a friend of mine to-morrow whom you can put on the claim."

Peter Bigman was in high glee. Another idea struck him on his way home—how he might further ingratiate himself with the Noble family. He rode to Mrs. Noble's and found the family in the house.

"I have just returned from Land View," he said to Harry; "and I have hit upon a plan to get rid of Peter Dick without any further trouble."

"Shall be mighty glad to hear it," said Harry.

He then told them about his negotiation about the soldier's declaration, but not telling them that he had paid for it.

"I'm going right over to Peter Dick's," he said, "and try and get him to move off here on to this other quarter section."

"It is very kind of you," said Mrs. Noble.

"Very," said Grace.

Peter Bigman went to Peter Dick and told him he

had another quarter section for him, which would not cost him any thing but the government fees, and he must move on it at once.

"All right," said Peter Dick, surlily; "you did well to get me out of this scrape."

Peter Bigman returned and told Harry that Peter Dick would move next day, which he did.

"How much did you pay to get him on the land covered by the soldier's declaration? I wish to repay you," said Harry.

"O, only a trifle," he replied, laughing. "I don't want it back; let that go on account of old times."

And though Harry insisted in every way, he would take nothing.

"I really think Peter Bigman is improving," said Minnie, after he had gone.

"It does look so," said Grace.

They all felt greatly relieved when Peter Dick's claim shanty formed no part of the landscape. Peter Bigman was now received on quite friendly terms by the Nobles.

CHAPTER XI.

Neighbors: Hon. Joshua Lambertson, Richard Moneycounter, Rev. John Landhunter—Sioux Indian merchants.

LIFE at Nobleton had now settled down into a regular routine. Monotonous to a certain extent, it was yet greatly at variance with the old city life. Dwelling so close to nature, in this country so new that the marks of the buffalo and antelope had scarcely been effaced—but yesterday the home of the Sioux Indians, many of whom dwelt on a reservation but a few miles away—made every thing seem new. But the tide of emigration flowed in rapidly; the excitement attending the settlement of the land yielded new events constantly, and added new acquaintances to the rapidly enlarging circle.

The Noble family became well known and popular in the county, and settlers would turn out of their way to have a pleasant conversation with the family, and enjoy for a short time their hospitality. Harry was free and generous and Mrs. Noble kind and lady-like to all; Minnie's vivacity was enjoyable, and Grace's natural dignity combined with gentleness won her many friends. Settlers, who had located their land several months before, now began to arrive, to make their improvements.

One afternoon in August an open carriage, drawn by two dark, Texas ponies, drove up to Mrs. Noble's house. The driver was quite a large man, with iron-gray hair, full, round, clean-shaven face, with a pleasant expression. Harry was plowing on his claim. Mrs. Noble went to the door.

"Will you not oblige me by giving me a drink of water, madam?" said the gentleman.

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Noble; "but will you not tie your horses and come in awhile; it is very hot to-day in the sun."

"Thank you kindly for the invitation," the gentleman replied. "I do find it hot to-day, and will very cheerfully accept your invitation."

After having a drink of water the gentleman introduced himself as Judge Joshua Lamberton. "I am the U. S. Circuit Judge of this district. I took up a preemption claim here a few months ago, and I have come to make some improvements on it. I am not required to reside on it, madam, as perhaps you are not aware; for the law allows a public officer, whose duties call him away, the privilege of taking up a preemption without the actual residence."

"A very equitable exception, I think," said Mrs. Noble.

"Very true, madam; if it were not so, the public officers would have but few opportunities to obtain citizens' rights in the public domain."

Mrs. Noble introduced Grace and Minnie to the

judge, who addressed them in a very gracious and fatherly manner.

"It affords me much pleasure to meet refined and educated young ladies on the frontier. I take great pleasure in the society of the young. I am a widower of many years standing, never had any children, which has always been a source of regret to me," said the judge.

"I can readily appreciate your feelings," Mrs. Noble replied, "for I can scarcely tell how I should continue to exist without my children."

"This is a grand country for the young to come to," said the judge; "the opportunities are so great to grow up with the country, and the country grows so rapidly that business and political opportunities come rapidly also."

"I have fully realized that," said Mrs. Noble, thinking of Harry's being elected delegate to the Constitutional Convention.

After some further pleasant conversation, in which the judge exerted himself to be very agreeable, he arose to take his departure.

"I hope you will always favor us with a call when your claim brings you into this part of the Territory," said Mrs. Noble.

"I shall most certainly do so. I have enjoyed my short call on your charming young ladies and yourself exceedingly, madam."

Hon. Joshua Lamberton was highly respected in

his district; he was a good friend and kind neighbor. Harry considered him more of a politician than a judge, but he was a politician of the better sort. He had obtained his position through his political influence. He was considered, among the legal fraternity, a tolerably well-read lawyer. He was a clever, kind-hearted man, of good natural judgment, and his decisions were generally on the right side. He had come West to grow up with the country, as he recommended others to do, and had succeeded remarkably well. He kept his promise to Mrs. Noble, and never failed to call on the family when he came to attend to his claim. When Harry became acquainted with him he liked him very much. Minnie and Grace were quite delighted to have so distinguished a neighbor as a United States judge; they enjoyed his calls and fatherly ways very much indeed.

One day when Harry was plowing—he put all his spare time to plowing—a gentleman, on a yellow Texas pony, rode up to him.

“You have a fine claim here,” he said, accosting Harry.

“I like it very much,” Harry replied.

“I presume you are Mr. Noble. I have often heard of you, but never had the pleasure of meeting you. My name is Richard Moneycounter; I have recently established a bank at Land View.”

“Yes, I have seen your new bank. It is an institution very much needed at Land View, for new set-

tlers are not usually blessed with a large amount of money."

"If they were they would have but little use for bankers," said Richard Moneycounter, laughing.

"There is room for all kinds of business in this new country. I came to get land," said Harry.

"Well, you know that is every body's business here. No matter what else they do, you'll find they all have land, or are trying to get it. I am like the rest. I did not feel satisfied until I got hold of a piece of land; so I have bought the relinquishment of a quarter section a couple of miles from here, and have just been over to see it."

"Will you not go over to the house with me and meet the family," said Harry.

"It would afford me great pleasure. I have seen the ladies of your family, but never was fortunate enough to meet with them."

Harry introduced him to his mother and the young ladies, and he had a very pleasant call. He looked with admiring eyes upon Grace, and it was not difficult to see that he was very greatly pleased with that young lady. The ladies were much pleased with his appearance and manners, and Mrs. Noble pronounced him "a very fine young man," after he had taken his departure, and she had given him a cordial invitation to call again.

Richard Moneycounter was from one of the eastern States. His father had sent him out with a small

capital, to make money out of the high rates of interest paid in the far West. He was a very fine young man, of good character and habits; quiet, sensible, and unassuming; his opinions had great weight with the new settlers. He was short, and rather stout; black hair, closely cut; black eyes, and full beard; he dressed in dark clothing. He had a quiet, dignified manner.

Harry heard one day, from a passer-by, that a young minister had taken a claim in that township, and, in order to show a neighborly feeling, determined to call on him, which he did the next day. He found the minister making maiden efforts to break the sod of the prairie with a plow and a yoke of oxen. He seemed glad to stop and rest as Harry rode up on horseback. Harry introduced himself, by name, as a neighbor.

"If I can be of any service to you, I shall be glad to help you in any way," said Harry. He began to feel himself an old settler, so many new ones had come in since he had arrived.

"I am thankful to you for your kind offer," said the minister, "and if I need friendly services I shall be pleased to call upon you. My name is John Landhunter; having a slight failure in health I have obtained a six months' leave of absence, and I am using it to obtain health and land at the same time."

"I hope you will be successful in obtaining both,"

said Harry ; “ and while you are with us I hope you will often favor us with your company. Our family consists of my mother, sister, mother’s ward, Grace Constant, and myself ; so you see we form quite a nice little company to make a settlement. You will know our place by the three red shanties ; we call it Nobleton.”

“ O, yes, I have heard several times of your pleasant family, and I shall be glad to avail myself of your kind invitation. I think it must be much pleasanter coming out to the frontier in families to settle than for a person to come alone ; but I do not expect to be alone long, for several other ministers, friends of mine, have taken adjoining claims, and will be here soon.”

“ I am pleased to hear that you are soon to have such congenial neighbors ; they will be a valuable acquisition to our township.”

Harry gave him another pressing invitation to call at Nobleton, and rode homeward.

Rev. John Landhunter was a tall and rather angular man ; he had black hair and eyes, and wore black side whiskers. His manners were friendly and pleasant. He belonged to a very large Protestant denomination ; was liberal in his views, though orthodox. He was energetic in his style of preaching, and was a good singer. He was popular with both saint and sinner. There was a spice of worldliness in his religion, which showed itself in his eagerness

to possess land, as well as in his occasional mixing in politics. He told Harry afterward that he was sorry he had not arrived sooner, that he might have been elected a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, as were a number of other ministers in the Territory. Although Harry learned to like Rev. John Landhunter greatly, as did all the Noble family, yet he always felt as though there was an incongruity between his profession and his eagerness to obtain government land. He observed this same eagerness in some other ministers who settled there; a number of whom, it seemed to him, were obliged to resort to evasions and subterfuges in their manner of taking up land, and at the same time fulfilling their duties in pulpits in the States, which were unworthy of their profession, which injured the cause of religion in the minds of those who knew the real facts, and which greatly lowered their spirituality and influence. These things might stand the legal test by straining in the land-office, but they would not so readily satisfy the consciences of the ministers or the minds of those who knew the real facts in the cases.

It occurred to Harry that there was a spice of unfairness in the law toward American citizens. "The public land is free to all citizens, and to all foreigners who have declared their intentions to become citizens." But a citizen must make actual settlement upon the land before he can acquire possession of it from the government. A man may come from

England, Ireland, Germany, France—indeed, from any nation, except China, and by declaring his intention to become a citizen, and going upon the land and making slight improvements upon it, may in five years become the owner of one hundred and sixty acres—free! It is a good law; let them come and welcome. But should the government not do something for her own citizens, whom circumstances prevent from going upon the land, and who have as much right to the land as any other class? Think of the ministers, physicians, lawyers, having small incomes; think of the clerks, mechanics, and others earning low wages, and tied down by circumstances—citizens by birthright, perhaps for generations.

What a boon it would be for them, in poverty or old age, to have a farm to depend upon! Could not our law-makers do something to place the public land within the honest reach of this large class? Many, perhaps, who could not afford the time and expense of making actual settlement, might be able to do so by proxy; and many things are done as honestly and as fairly by proxy, as they would be done by the person being actually present. Indeed, it would not seem out of the way for the government of the people, through its agents, to have these necessary improvements made for its citizens; providing it was regularly and honestly paid for them. Is there not a germ of truth in Harry's thoughts worth fair consideration and perhaps action?

Rev. John Landhunter soon found an opportunity to avail himself of Harry's invitation to visit Nobleton. He called the next Sunday morning on his way to church. Harry went to the door and invited him to dismount.

"I cannot stay long," he said, "as I am on my way to church, and I thought I would call and see if you were not all going; if so, I would join your company."

"We are all going," said Harry, "but come in and see the folks before we start."

The minister dismounted and entered the house, he was duly introduced to the ladies, and rode along-side the wagon as they drove to church.

Mrs. Noble told him that they were greatly pleased to have a minister of their own denomination so near a neighbor.

"I certainly consider myself very fortunate to have settled so near to so pleasant a family," he said, smiling.

"You are lucky, that's a fact," said Minnie, sardonically.

"Very true," he replied, not at all nonplussed.

The minister who led the services invited Rev. John Landhunter to assist, which he did, particularly in the singing. He noticed that there were a good many children in the congregation, and after the services he began canvassing to see if a Sunday-school could not be started next Sunday. He had already promised to preach on that day. He was a

very energetic minister. A number of the children promised to become scholars, and the Nobles and several others promised to become teachers.

He rode home with the Nobles and accepted their invitation to remain to lunch ; after which they gathered around the melodeon and sang selections from "Gospel Hymns" until evening. He remained to tea, by invitation, after which he conducted family worship, and then started for his claim shanty.

"I never thought I should spend so home-like a Sunday on the prairie," he said to Mrs. Noble, as he bade the family "Good-night."

A few days afterward Minnie was going over to Mrs. Snow's to help that burdened woman, when she saw Rev. John Landhunter riding toward her. He rode up to her.

"How do you do, Miss Noble?" he inquired, pleasantly.

"Very well, I thank you."

"May I inquire where you are going, all alone on the prairie?"

"O! just over to Mrs. Snow's to help her awhile with her work; she has such a houseful of children that she is glad of a little help; she is a widow, and lonely, too; that is, if a woman ever could be lonely with such a pack of lively young ones as she has."

"I'm on my way to Land View, but I am in no great haste, and, if you have no objection, I will ac-

company you to see this poor widow and her interesting family."

"O! I have no objection," said Minnie, "would be pleased to have your company; I would not be surprised, though, if you made a short call on account of those children."

"I think they will not drive me off; I like children; don't you?"

"Well, yes," hesitatingly; "I like children, but these are so dreadfully lively."

Rev. John Landhunter found this young lady lively and interesting. They had a pleasant conversation as they walked along together, for he had dismounted, led his horse, and walked beside her. He told her of his eastern home, his work in the churches, the good he had accomplished, his failing health, and the good he hoped to accomplish when he would return to the active work of the ministry again. "I feel quite lonesome here," he said, "because I was among my people so much, and greatly miss their society."

"Perhaps you miss the society of *one particular friend*," said Minnie, with a sly look.

"O, no," he said, hastily. "I had many friends, warm, genial friends, among the sisterhood, and in the congregation, but no *one particular friend*."

"With great charity you spread your friendship over them all, I suppose," said Minnie, laughingly.

"I suppose that does express it," he said, smilingly,

"notwithstanding the tantalizing way in which you speak it."

"Here they come!" said Minnie, as they approached Mrs. Snow's, and the children all rushed toward them.

"O, Minnie! so glad to see you," cried Jenny.

"Must thay Mith Minnie," said Aggy.

"You little darling, give me a kiss," said Minnie, picking her up and kissing her.

"Did you bring any cake?" queried Jack.

"O, Jack, you'll catch it," said Tom, in a stage-whisper. "Mamma told us not to ask for any thing."

"Yes, I have a pocket full of ginger-snaps," said Minnie, taking them out and treating them all.

"This is Mr. Landhunter, a new minister, children," said Minnie; "he's going to start a Sunday-school."

"We'll go!" they all shouted.

They walked to the house, with the children all around them munching ginger-snaps.

Mrs. Snow received them all in a flurry at being caught so upside down. Minnie introduced the minister. He sat down and conversed awhile, the children clustering around and listening. He told Mrs. Snow about the projected Sunday-school at Land View, and invited her to bring all the children.

"We all promised to go," said Jack.

"I am very thankful for the chance," said Mrs. Snow; "for I want my snow birdies, as I call them sometimes," smiling, "to be brought up religiously."

After a short call, Rev. John Landhunter mounted his horse and rode away.

A few days afterward a dilapidated, canvas-covered wagon, drawn by a pair of slow oxen, drove up to Mrs. Noble's door. A promiscuous company of Indians accompanied it; four squaws and two papooses were in the wagon, sitting some on the floor and some on wood, with which the wagon was partially loaded. Seven Indians walked along-side and behind; one driving the oxen. Two of the women were old, wrinkled, blear-eyed, with long-neglected black hair; the other two squaws were young women, plump and rather good-looking, if they had been clean. The squaws were all dressed in cheap calico, wore shawls over their heads, and moccasins on their feet. The papooses were full-faced, round-limbed, black-haired, black-eyed, stolid-looking babies.

The men were all dressed in cheap, faded, and much-worn coats, pants, and shirts, doubtless furnished by the government. They all wore moccasins; their hair was long, coarse, and very black; they were short in stature, coffee-colored, with high-cheek bones and stolid-looking faces. Doubtless fierce and relentless in war—perhaps some of them had taken more than one white man's scalp. But they were peaceful now; they were the wards of the government, and lived on the Sioux Reservation near by. To-day they were bent on mercantile pursuits, and these eleven Indians had traveled hither with

hard and patient industry to sell this part of a load of wood. True, it is an improvement on their uncivilized condition; for it is better for the Indians to exert themselves, with a minimum of labor, than to hunt hard for white men's scalps.

They had also for sale a pipe or two, carved from the red pipe-stone clay, which is very soft and easily worked when first taken from the ground, but afterward becomes very hard. The Indians prize this clay very highly, and have reserved the section of land on which the pipe-stone quarry is situated for their use. Hither they journey every year to obtain supplies of this, to them, precious stone, from which to make their pipes. They carve their pipes in many designs, some of them quite unique. They also had a few moccasins for sale. Their principal stock in trade, however, on this trip, was wood.

Harry was in the house when they arrived, and went to the door, as did the ladies, who had frightened faces, for they thought of the terrible doings of this same tribe of Sioux Indians a few years before; the massacres and terrible slaughter, in which women fare infinitely worse than men; and being so far from civilization, it is scarcely to be wondered at that they were somewhat frightened; but there was no occasion for their fears, for the Indians were perfectly peaceable and friendly.

"How!" said Harry to the Indians, using their common salutation, which greatly pleased them.

"How!" the men responded.

One of the men pointed to the wood, and made signs that they wanted to sell.

"How much?" Harry inquired.

"Three dollars."

They needed some fire-wood, so Harry paid them three dollars, and told them to unload. This pleased them, and they unloaded the wood. The squaws got off the wagon with the papooses; they cast stolid but still inquisitive looks at the dresses of the ladies—the question of dress appears to be interesting to women of every race and condition. The wood unloaded, the men showed their pipes and moccasins to Harry. He had no use for the pipes, but bought a pair of moccasins, which were quite prettily ornamented with colored morocco. The ladies tried to attract the papooses to them, but they only looked at them in a strange stolid way. Directly the squaws and papooses got into the wagon again; the oxen were started, and the procession wended its slow way to Land View, where the Indians sold the rest of their pipes and moccasins, and spent the money in the stores. Afterward they camped there for the night, just on the outskirts of the town.

"What do you think of Indians, Min?" Harry inquired, after they were gone.

"I think they are horrid, dirty things."

"We must not expect too much from them, Minnie dear," said Mrs. Noble; "remember, they have

not had a tithe of the opportunities which we have had."

"Did you feel afraid of them, Grace?" Harry inquired.

"Yes; I felt rather timid at first, but I soon got over my fear. Do you think there is any real danger from them?"

"No; they belong to the reservation, and are under military supervision; they know, too, that there are too many whites here now for them to attempt to make trouble, with any chance of success."

"Do you think they will ever become civilized?" Minnie inquired.

"I think it will be many years before they are fully so. They make some attempts at farming; the younger ones will doubtless become pretty well civilized, particularly those who are being sent to Indian schools, but we cannot expect such advancement from the older ones."

"They are said to be such a proud race; these did not look proud."

"No, they certainly did not; but if you had asked one of those stolid-looking warriors about his forefathers, he would have told you that all this broad land was their hunting-ground, as I heard one of them say at Land View the other day. Our quarter sections appear small compared with their vast possessions, do they not? But they did not utilize their birthright. The ground was but slightly tilled; the valuable for-

ests were untouched; the rich mines of coal, iron, silver, gold, and other precious things were unopened; while they, in happy simplicity, hunted the buffalo and the deer, and waged war upon each other. So God has taken their rich heritage away from them and given it to a race that has entered upon and possessed it, and will possess it to its fullest capacity."

"That is quite a good little speech, Harry. I guess you are preparing for the convention," said Minnie, laughing.

"It is about the truth of the matter, whether you call it a speech or any thing else. But speaking of their pride reminds me of a scene which I saw at Land View a few days ago. It showed how ludicrous their pride sometimes becomes when they attempt to imitate the ways of the white man. I saw a dilapidated top-buggy coming down street; the varnish had worn off the top in places and showed the white cloth underneath; the buggy was rickety, muddy, and shabby. It was drawn by a lank Indian pony, whose ribs were plainly discernable, with wretched harness. In the buggy were seated two Indians, rather small men, dressed in much-worn, ready-made, shabby-looking clothes, with very dilapidated black felt hats on their heads. The driver, who had a satisfied and complacent look, as though he felt himself 'big Injun in white man's buggy,' I was told was the chief, White Swan. So, you see, they not only have pride, like the whites, but vanity, also."

"The wild life they lead must be very hard upon the women," Mrs. Noble remarked.

"Very," Harry replied. "They are, as you know, obliged to do all the drudgery. The men think it beneath them to do laborious work. Theirs to hunt, fish, and fight; the squaws, to labor. I have been told that the hard life of the squaws makes them prematurely aged, and that many of the wrinkled, bleary-eyed squaws would in civilized life be comparatively young women."

"Poor woman!" said Mrs. Noble, with a sigh; "nowhere but in civilized countries, and under the Christian religion, does she receive proper treatment and respect."

CHAPTER XII.

Going to the Constitutional Convention—Jacob Shark—A drive around Sioux Falls—Brookings' Island—The falls—Sioux quartzite—The Constitutional Convention—Harry's speech—Jack Lucky, the old settler.

THE month of August had almost passed away. The Noble family expected to have a dry month, for the fame of Dakota, that had gone forth, was of a country of few rain-falls. But such was not their experience, for there were many hard thunder showers. Great black, angry-looking clouds would roll up, in mountains upon mountains, darkening the day; the wind would rush over the prairies in terrific gusts; the vivid lightnings shoot in long, forked streaks across the sky; the thunder roll and roar as though it would shake the earth to its foundations; the rain fall in torrents, sometimes followed by heavy hail. It seemed as if the elements were in rebellion. Some of the settlers feared the dreaded cyclones, and those who had cellars fled to them for safety. But after the storm was over, and the sun had broken through the clouds, and the wind, now gentle, had dried the grass, the whole face of the country looked fresh, new, and beautiful.

The Constitutional Convention had been the object

of much discussion, and the family looked forward to it as an agreeable change.

On Monday, the third of September, they started in the farm wagon for Plankinton, where they were to take the railroad for Sioux Falls. Peter Bigman accompanied them on horseback, he having volunteered his services to drive the wagon back from Plankinton. He was making himself a serviceable neighbor. Mrs. Noble sat on the front seat with Harry, and the young ladies on the back seat. Peter Bigman rode most of the time on Grace's side of the wagon, but occasionally went over to Minnie's side, not wishing, at that time, to make his attentions to Grace appear too marked. They stopped a few minutes at the hotel at Land View. Here they were joined by Richard Moneycounter. He said he was going to Plankinton on business, and asked permission to ride along-side. The ladies granted the request very pleasantly, for they respected and admired the young banker very much.

"Really we are quite stylish," said Grace to Richard Moneycounter, "driving to the convention with one pair of horses and two attendant cavaliers."

"Are the Noble family not of the aristocracy of the prairies, and should they not travel well attended?" he replied, smiling.

"O do not call us aristocrats!" said Grace. "We have, I hope, left all that behind us. All should be pure democrats here."

"Socially, you mean, of course?"

"O yes! we are not talking politics, you know."

Richard Moneycounter had ridden along-side of Grace when they left Land View, and seldom changed his place all the way to Plankinton, chatting pleasantly most of the way. Peter Bigman had not expected this interruption, and the old scowl would at times settle on his face, despite his attempts to drive it away and to appear pleasant; but he felt himself at a disadvantage in addressing Grace, since he was obliged to talk to her over Minnie. Then, too, a little angry jealousy began to stir within him toward the young banker; for he could not but observe that he seemed much attached to Grace, and he also observed that Grace's manner was much freer and more natural toward the banker than it had ever been toward him.

The party arrived at Plankinton in time for the train, and bidding a friendly good-bye to the banker and Peter Bigman, they got aboard; Peter Bigman promising Harry to see that all went right at Noble-ton while he was away.

Harry being elected a delegate to the convention was secretly a bitter thing to Peter Bigman. He felt that he was abused; that his former subordinate was elected above him; but he must conceal his feelings if he would maintain his friendly relations with the family; so he smothered them in their presence, and only indulged them when alone. As a relief, while

going back to Land View with the young banker, he told him of the important position he had held in the office of a great railroad company, and the authority he had; the number of clerks he had under him, Harry being one of them, etc.

"But why did you leave so good a position to come out on the prairie?" the banker inquired.

"O my health got rather poor, and I thought I would follow my friends to Dakota and start a cattle ranch."

After that he soon changed the subject.

Harry and Grace sat together in the car and Minnie and her mother sat behind them. Harry and Grace were enjoying a pleasant little conversation when the train arrived at the first station. A fashionably-dressed young man, wearing a good deal of jewelry, got on the train, and took the empty seat in front of them. He looked hot and excited. It seemed to Harry that he had a familiar look, but he could not at once place him.

"Great guns! the time I've had catching this train!" he said, taking off a fashionable straw hat, and wiping his face with a fancy-colored silk handkerchief, turning toward Harry sideways in the seat as he spoke.

"See, I'm traveling for a Chicago clothing house, and must carry big sample trunks. Well, I've been in the country back of the station selling goods; hired a livery team. I was afraid I'd miss this train,

and have to stop in this blasted town overnight, so I offered the driver five dollars if he'd catch the train. Better believe he whipped up them Texas ponies. Well, I got here just as the train did. Then I was afraid they'd never get my trunks aboard. Don't believe they ever would if I hadn't pitched in and helped them. Why, howd'ye do; thought you was a stranger first; but now I remember you," reaching his hand over the seat and shaking hands with Harry.

"I have certainly met you somewhere," said Harry, smiling, "but I—"

"Come, now; don't you remember sleeping with me at the ranch at Oak Hollow, the night the wind blew the window in on us?"

"O, yes; I remember it all now perfectly well," laughing. "I hope you have not been so unfortunate since?"

"Don't know as I have, quite so; but you know a traveling man has to put up with all sorts of accommodations. Which way are you traveling?"

"To the convention at Sioux Falls."

"Delegate?"

"Yes."

"Thought so. It don't take a man long to get into politics in this country. Where are you going to stop in Sioux Falls?"

"I suppose we will stop at a hotel until I can find a good private boarding house. I have heard that

the 'Cataract' is a good house; do you know any thing about it?"

"Know any thing about it? Should rather think I did. Traveling men, or drummers, as they call us, are about the best authority you can get on hotels; that's where they live, moving around from one to another all the time. 'Cataract's' a good house; used to go there, but went to the new 'Commercial' with a lot of the boys when it was opened."

"I think we'll try the 'Cataract.'"

"Wish we were at Sioux Falls."

"Don't you get very tired of traveling so much?"

"To tell the truth I do sometimes, but as yet I'm rather young in the business. I heard a man, who has grown gray in the business, say the other day, 'That it was the meanest business a man can get into, and that if you want to ruin a young man just start him out on the road selling goods. He's subject to all kinds of temptations, in the different towns and cities he goes to. He is away from all domestic ties and friendly restraints; thrown among a lot of fast young men continually, and it is not much wonder if he yields to temptation. If you want a young man to go to the devil just put him on the road to sell goods.' I think the old man was about right."

"But all the traveling salesmen are not fast men?" said Harry, rather shocked.

"O, no, not all; there's some as good men as you'll

find anywhere; but they must have harder heads or more Christianity than most men."

Arriving at Sioux Falls, our travelers expected to find a town similar to Mitchell. When the train arrived at the depot they beheld several omnibuses drawn up by the platform, and the cries of the different hotel-runners reminded them of the depots of some of the more pretentious cities of the East. Taking seats in the "Cataract" 'bus, which was crowded, they were whirled at a lively pace up Phillips Avenue, the principal street. There were many obstructions in the streets, caused by the erection of various new buildings. The place presented the appearance of most large western towns of rapid growth. The houses and stores varied from the humble one-storied frame house to the dignified large brick building. There were all kinds of stores, several hotels, and a number of restaurants, saloons, and gambling houses. The streets were full of busy workmen and active pedestrians. The 'bus drew up at the Cataract House on a trot, backed up to the pavement, and our Land View friends, with others, were handed out by one of the proprietors. The ladies were shown to the parlor while Harry registered. Having obtained pleasant rooms, on the first floor front, he returned to the parlor with a servant, who escorted them to their rooms.

"Supper's ready, sir," the servant said, as he showed Harry into his room.

"We will soon be down, for we are all tired and hungry from our day's ride."

They found the dining-room to be a large, high, comfortable room. They were seated by an obsequious, French head-waiter, whose hair was gorgeously curled and frizzled, and were waited upon by a tidy and neatly-dressed waiter girl. The table linen and napkins were white, the silver bright, the supper well cooked, and of sufficient variety. It seems superfluous to say that our friends enjoyed the meal heartily, and the comforts of civilization seemed greater from having been denied them awhile.

"O, Harry, isn't this nice?" Minnie exclaimed, when they were seated in a group in a corner of the cozy parlor. "Brussels carpet, velvet furniture, a chandelier, and gas all through the house."

"Yes," added Harry, laughing, and the house is brick, three stories high, and has a tower on one corner."

"That's not all, either," retorted Minnie, "there's an electric bell in my room, and I noticed the beds had hair mattresses and wire cloth bottoms."

"I am afraid we shall be enervated by so much luxury after living at Nobleton so long," said Grace, smiling.

"But you must not say any thing against Nobleton," said Mrs. Noble, "for that is our home."

"No, indeed!" Harry replied; "but it must be confessed we are rather destitute of some of the

luxuries of modern civilization. But just wait awhile; if we're lucky, it wont take long to build a handsome mansion, and make it as comfortable as this house."

Harry discovered next morning that but a portion of the delegates had arrived, and that all the work likely to be accomplished that day was to organize, which was done in a short time in the afternoon; thus the delegates present had most of the day upon their hands to make observations upon Sioux Falls, about which so much had been said and written.

Harry had begun to feel some interest in real-estate matters, for a friend of his mother's had written that if good opportunities offered he would like to invest some of his savings in the new country, hoping to realize large profits in the rise in yalues in the near future. As he was walking in Phillips Avenue, in the morning, he noticed a bulletin board along-side the door of a real-estate broker's office. He stopped to read the advertisements of the property offered for sale. He had only been standing there a few minutes when rather a tall man, with black hair, deep-set cunning black eyes, yellow complexion, and big black mustache, dressed in shabby black, with rusty-looking, military slouch hat, came bustling nervously to the door. He did not speak at once, but, while pretending to be looking across the street, he eyed Harry from the corner of his eyes.

"Looking for land, sir?" he at length inquired, suavely.

"A friend of ours in the East wishes to make some investments in Dakota. I am looking around a little to see if I can find any thing which will suit him," Harry replied.

"Walk in, sir. Glad to have you. I have a great deal of land for sale. Delegate, sir?"

"Yes, I am a delegate from Douglas County."

"Walk in, sir; walk in, sir," urgently.

Harry, thus constrained, walked into the office, which was a meagerly-furnished room, having a desk on one side and a few cane-seat arm-chairs scattered around, a stove, and a couple of much tobacco-splattered spittoons.

"Have a seat, sir. Would be glad to have you make my office your head-quarters while you are in the city. If you want to write letters, or sit and read the paper, or wish to meet friends by appointment, just come right in and make yourself perfectly at home. My name is Jacob Shark."

All this was said in a very cordial way. After they were seated Harry inquired what land was selling for in the vicinity of the city.

"Land's cheap around here, cheaper than it is near any of the other large towns in Dakota. I can sell you quarter sections all the way from \$1,500 to \$4,000. I have a couple within two miles of the city limits that I will sell for \$1,500 each. They're

bonanzas. Better write to your friend about them right away; they're bonanzas. I tell you God's truth," with great energy. "I know a bargain when I see a bargain. I sell more bargains than any other real-estate man in Sioux Falls; that's a fact. I have another quarter section ten miles from here. Young woman owns it. She wants to sell out cheap and go East. Can sell you that for \$650. Must be sold right away; that's a bargain. I hope I may die if it aint," with great earnestness. "Mind, I only make two and one half per cent. commission, so it would not pay me to tell you a lie. Want to see any of those quarter sections? If you do will hitch up and drive you out."

"If I have time I may drive out with you and look at them while I am here. Do you deal in city lots also?"

"O yes! Can sell you a lot from \$50 up to \$5,000. Will take you to look at them, too, if you wish. Can you go this afternoon? Pleasant day, nice drive."

"I have three ladies with me, or I would drive out with you."

"That's all right; that's all right. Fond of the ladies myself. Will call around this afternoon and take you all out. Where are you stopping?"

"At the 'Cataract.'"

"All right. Will be around at three o'clock."

Harry got up and went to the door.

"Don't forget to make my office your headquarters—read papers, write letters, any thing," following Harry to the door. "Day, sir."

Jacob Shark was a Yankee. He had traversed the country "from ocean to ocean," and back again as far as Dakota. He was sharp, shrewd, and unscrupulous. He had no regard for the truth. To a man accustomed to the world his ways and overweening selfishness were transparent, but to the verdant and uninitiated he was dangerous. He was nervous in his ways and exacting with the servants at the hotels, and generally disagreeable with those who were well acquainted with him; a man of no weight, influence, or character. But where it suited his purpose he could make himself quite agreeable for the time, as he had a tolerable education, and was a verbose talker; he could, when he wished, talk interestingly, and thus secured sometimes customers from the educated class. He was a great advertiser, and used every plan which his ingenuity could design to ingratiate himself with strangers.

A short description of the settlement of Sioux Falls may be interesting. Away back in the year 1856, when Dakota was considered a howling wilderness, terribly cold in winter, dry and waterless in summer, fit habitation for Sioux Indians, cruel and bloodthirsty, buffalo, and prairie dogs, the first settlement of Sioux Falls was made. But the settlement was only of short duration, for in 1857 the Indian

troubles drove the settlers away. The brave pioneers, however, soon returned. They were but a handful. In 1857-58 the total census numbered but sixteen souls. Many were the Indian scares, and so great was the dread of the terrible Sioux that the population did not increase up to 1869. In 1862 the place was entirely abandoned on account of a dreadful massacre on the Minnesota frontier. The Sioux entered the settlement after the settlers had fled and destroyed by fire all the houses but three. Had the settlers not fled, doubtless not one had been left to tell the tale of blood. From the month of August, 1862, to May, 1865, the whole Sioux Valley was deserted by white settlers. Upon the latter date they ventured again into the lovely valley, and it began to settle up rapidly, especially in the year 1870, when the immigration was very large. Thus was the beautiful city begun in trials, distress, and terror; thus do the possessions of the Indian pass from them to the white man, resist as they may. "Westward the star of empire takes its way," but it is the white man's star. Where, alas! is the poor Indian's star? Whither has it gone? Some baleful shadow has covered it, and he looks for his beacon in vain. But is he not a child of the Great Spirit as well as the white man? Will not God care for him also?

Sioux Falls is the capital of Minnehaha County. It has a population of about six thousand. It is one thousand four hundred and thirteen feet above the

level of the sea. It has two railroads, four banks, three weeklies and one daily paper, two mills, two foundries, two fine, large hotels, and a number of smaller ones, and many large stores with fine, large stocks of goods. There are fourteen church organizations and eight church edifices; the Baptist University, the Episcopal school, and a commercial college. Neither is it behind in the latest modern inventions; it since boasts of a telegraph company, a gas company, and has a steam fire-engine and electric lights.

The real-estate agent, in order to interest them in the place, and having an eye to business, drove up to the "Cataract" in the afternoon, with a three-seated open wagon, such as is quite commonly used in the country, drawn by a pretty little pair of Texas ponies, and invited Harry and his friends to take a drive around the place. Harry consented, and the ladies were quite glad to take the ride and to see the beauties of the place. A drive through Sioux Falls and the pleasant surrounding country never fails to please. They drove first south through busy, bustling Phillips Avenue, passing the handsome Masonic Temple—in course of construction, at a cost of \$50,000, which would have been an ornament to a much larger place—and at the end of the street passed through a beautiful grove of young trees, among which several cottages of tasteful designs were being built. Crossing the railroad and driving up on the hill beyond,

the agent turned the horses that they might have a good view of the city below. It is a beautiful sight. The city lies embosomed in the Big Sioux Valley; the tortuous river, spanned by two bridges, winding through it. On the western hill-side are many pretty cottage homes, some of them with terraced grounds and young shade trees; on the eastern hill-side are but few buildings, but several of these are fine and substantial—the Territorial Deaf and Dumb Asylum, built of jasper granite; the school-house, built of brick; the beautiful Reformed Church, of jasper granite, built through the indefatigable exertions of Rev. Dr. Livingston, of the old New York family of that name. Not far from where the carriage stood was to be begun, the next year, the erection of the Episcopal school of southern Dakota, and in another direction not far away the building of the Baptist college of southern Dakota had already been begun. The place, therefore, in connection with its commercial and other advantages, is likely to become in the future an important educational center.

They then drove on to the eastern side of the city, from which they obtained another fine view; then along the avenue, on top of the western hill, to the penitentiary, passing scores of beautiful homes, some of them built in elegant Queen Anne style, some large mansions, many pretty cottages; there were good streets, good pavements, and generally lawns and flower gardens around the houses, and but few

fences, thus giving a park-like appearance to the place. The penitentiary is a large castle-like building on a prominent hill north of the town, very conspicuous. It is built of jasper granite, trimmed with a light-colored stone, which makes a handsome and striking contrast; its appearance is very impressive, but one could but regret, while looking upon it, that the sinfulness of man made such a building necessary. From the penitentiary they had another fine view of the place, and they could not but exclaim at the beauty and variety of the various views. From this point they could not only see the city, but have, also, a good view of lovely Brookings' Island, and the falls just below. They never seemed to tire looking upon the lovely scene, but directly the agent started his team and they returned to the hotel, having made an almost complete circuit of the place. The agent, while driving them to see the fine views, had not neglected to point out eligible building lots which he had for sale, and to descant upon the advantages of Sioux Falls, not only as a place of residence, but also as a desirable place in which to speculate in city lots.

"I really do not see how I am going to make my friends in the East believe there is such a lovely place as Sioux Falls in Dakota," Grace remarked, when they were seated in the parlor after tea.

"It will require your best powers of description, my dear," Mrs. Noble replied, enthusiastically.

"I don't believe she can make them understand it, if she tries her best," said Minnie.

"People say that the island and the falls are the best of all, suppose we get up early in the morning and go there," said Harry ; and so it was agreed.

At the foot of the principal street is the island, Brookings' Island, named after Judge Brookings, the original claimant, a prominent and liberal-spirited gentleman, now a resident of Sioux Falls. The island is about twelve acres in extent. It is very beautiful. It lies close by the Big Sioux River, where it takes its desperate leap over the jasper granite rocks, scattering "disheveled locks" of spray and fragmentary rainbows in the sunbeams. The island is nearly level, and covered with verdure. It is here the spring flowers first bloom, and lovers and little children come to gather them ; the air is musical with birds. The island is shaded with grand old trees, principally oak and elm, some of them bent and gnarled from wrestlings with a thousand tempests ; others young and vigorous, gathering strength to resist the tempests when the protecting monarchs fall. In the prairie country, where trees are rare, the profuse foliage and shade are enjoyed with an added zest.

The island is the gift of nature to man, and is still unadorned by him. There are a few rambling paths through trees, a few rough board seats, and a rough platform at one end, and a swing. These are used

for Sunday-school and other picnics, and the platform for religious services, often held on Sunday afternoons. Here, doubtless, the familiar tone of a hymn has fallen upon the ear of many a wayward wanderer from home and friends, far away, reminding him of sweet innocent days, and calling him back to truth and duty. Walking the whole length of the island, we pass from under its delightful shade out upon the sea of bare and irregular jasper granite rock; the roar of the falls has been a dull, pleasant bass on the ear on the island, but now it grows louder. There is no regular path, and careful walking is required, up and down, over the irregular, pinkish-looking stone, covered in some places with dry green moss; in others polished, smooth as glass, evidently by water. Here and there are patches of bushes and long grass in clefts and secluded places in the rock. To the right of us the river rushes madly for its leap; there are rocks here upon which we may, by cautious stepping, advance far into the rushing stream; but be very careful, for here a young artist, who, one moonlight night, was making a sketch, accompanied by a friend, fell in. Unconscious of danger, laughing and talking with his friend as he fell, he was borne over the dreadful falls, and was drowned with the laugh upon his lips. Over the rough path we walk to the falls. In the spring-time, when the river is high, one grand sheet of water tumbles and roars over the falls. Now the water is not so high, there are three sep-

arate falls. The nearest is a deep, narrow torrent rushing through a narrow chasm, its dark-yellow current dashing down upon the rocks, and boiling and bubbling up in spray and foam. Between this and the next, or middle, fall, is a high wall of serried and seamed jasper granite, which extends out in a point between this and the last fall. The rock under this fall is in irregular steps; the highest at the bottom, and growing lower to the top. There is not a large body of water going over this fall, and its fall is broken many times in falling over these serried steps, spreading it out in a feathery, fan-like way, which gives it a white and dazzling appearance in the sunshine, making a striking contrast with the dark rocks behind. These two falls give you a sense of beauty, but beyond is the great fall which gives you a sense of majestic power, for here the great body of the river, slightly divided by a small rock projection near the other side, comes pouring down in one great mass, rushing, falling, roaring, seething; on top a dark, compact, yellow-liquid mass, becoming a lighter yellow as it falls, edged with spray and foam, plunging into the tossing pool beneath, it rises a white, boiling, bubbling, foaming mass and rushes away. Fragments of rainbows crown the giant. Below the falls, on either side, are rough irregular jasper granite walls, and beyond, on the east side, rises the seven-storied "Queen Bee Mill," built of jasper granite, an idle, unfortunate queen bee. Below the falls the river

makes a double curve between its rocky banks ; the second curve, just below a little wooden bridge, where its bed is very narrow, is very sharp and abrupt, and as the powerful stream in its rapid descent strikes the impeding rocks, it is thrown backward and boils, like an immense pot—when the water is high, a dreadful pot. In the country around the falls the prairie rises into green hills, with a little house and a few trees here and there, which break their monotony and add human interest to the grand scene.

The rocks, so frequently mentioned in the description of the falls, are a geological curiosity. The writer, presuming that a description of them may be interesting to many of his readers, gives an extract from a paper read by Judge Fisher before the Academy of Science of Des Moines, Iowa, as follows :

“ The region embracing North-western Iowa and South-western Minnesota is not remarkable for many exposures of rock strata. It possesses, however, some features of geological interest. Except in the extreme north-west corner of the State, the only exposures of rock, in place, along any of the streams in north-western Iowa are of the cretaceous age. Geologically, this is the newest stratified rock formation, and its natural position rests immediately below the drift. In that region it consists of sandstone and shale, which are very soft and friable. And here appears a very interesting fact in geology. It is that this most recent of stratified rock formation lies, to

all appearances, in this region, directly upon the oldest—the azoic. The cretaceous exposures extend along the Big Sioux River to a point very near the north-west corner of Iowa, where suddenly appears what Dr. White has denominated Sioux quartzite—a formation whose geological position is naturally more than 2,000 feet below the cretaceous. All the other formations in the geological scale are entirely wanting. The old earth and the new are here brought together, with all the formations which should represent the intervening ages eliminated by some strange catastrophe not recorded in any book which man has written. The quartzite, as before stated, first makes its appearance at the extreme corner of Iowa, causing at this point a fall in the Big Sioux River. Ten miles up the valley, toward the north-west, we come to a series of cascades or falls, where the river, within a distance of half a mile, has a descent of about sixty feet. These falls are caused by a bold outcrop of the same formation. Its thickness has been estimated at 300 feet—the estimate being made from actual measurement of the falls, and the dip of the strata. Other exposures of the same metamorphic rock are seen as far east as New Ulm in the valley of the Minnesota River. The most interesting exposures, however, are on a small tributary of the Big Sioux, in Pipestone County, Minnesota. Here, inclosed in quartzite, is found the famous pipe-stone, called by mineralogists catlinite, so named from the

fact of its location, and the Indian traditions connected with it were first fully described by Mr. Catlin, the celebrated traveler, author, and artist. This vein of metamorphic clay, for such it is, lies between layers of quartzite, and is about one foot in thickness. It is the opinion of geologists that it was originally a bed of clay between accumulations of sand, and that the same metamorphic action which transformed the sand into quartzite, also converted the clay into this catlinite or pipe-stone. Its color is red, like that of the quartzite. No traces of fossils are found in either, for they were a part of a world that existed before its matter had undergone the metamorphosis which resulted in this oldest rock formation, and before any living creature could exist upon the planet. Here we behold the remains of that dead and long buried primeval world, exhumed by some of nature's forces, that in later times God's intelligent creatures might have some conception of its condition when the earth was without form and void. While the quartzite inclosing the catlinite is exceedingly hard, the latter, when first quarried, is easily cut and fashioned into any desired shape."

The quarrying and working of this Sioux quartzite, jasper stone, jasper granite, or Sioux Falls granite, by all of which names it is called, is, perhaps, the most prominent industry of Sioux Falls. It is used in large quantities, in blocks for paving streets. It is used in Chicago, Omaha, and elsewhere. It also makes a

beautiful building stone, some of the best buildings in the Territory being built of it. The stone is susceptible of a fine polish, as is shown by its glassy surface where the water has run over it. Polishing works have been erected, and when the system of polishing has been perfected it will doubtless become an important industry. It is a very hard rock, but breaks easily, in straight lines, by a hard, sudden blow. In color it varies from a light pink to quite a dark blue, there being many shades, some of which are very beautiful. In some buildings it is used in contrast with the lighter colored and softer stones of Nebraska and Minnesota with beautiful effect.

The Noble family were charmed and delighted with their trip to Brookings' Island and the falls; they unanimously voted that Sioux Falls, with its grand scenery and beautiful surroundings, far surpassed any thing that they expected to find in Dakota.

Harry attended the morning session of the convention, and the ladies busied themselves in hunting a private boarding-house; for the family purse was not long enough to bear the strain of an extended stay at the "Cataract," and the pay of delegates was, as yet, an unknown quantity.

They were extremely fortunate in their search, for Mrs. Noble found the lady of one of the houses, to which they were referred, to be an old acquaintance, who had emigrated to Dakota a couple of years before, and of whom she had lost track. The husband

of this lady had been quite successful in business, and it was not from necessity that they took boarders; but the hotel accommodations of the place being inadequate for the crowd of delegates, and others attending the convention, this family, in common with many of the citizens, had hospitably agreed to do their part in entertaining strangers. The house was a beautiful and roomy cottage, surrounded by a fine lawn. Mrs. Noble was pleased to meet her old acquaintance, and at once decided to occupy the comfortable apartments; much to the delight of the lady of the house, who said: "I want to have some good, long chats with you about old times and old acquaintances."

They moved to their new quarters that day, and Harry was pleased with their good fortune.

Harry now devoted himself assiduously to the work of the convention. The convention was held in Germania Hall, on Ninth Street, a little more than a block from the Cataract House. The hall is a brick building, two stories high, the main hall being on the second story. For a new country it is a large and comfortable room. The walls are nicely papered; at the front end is a theater stage with curtain and footlights, at the rear end a gallery. The president occupied the stage, a small table being in front of him. The secretaries and reporters occupied a space set apart for them just below the stage. The delegates were seated at small, green baize-covered tables, accord-

ing to their counties. Several small boys were employed to act as pages. The stage was decorated with the "stars and stripes," festooned over it, in the center of which was an engraving of "The Father of his Country." Over the hall the flag of "our country" floated.

One hundred and thirty-five delegates attended the convention, many of them coming long and tedious journeys, even from the Black Hills, with its long and weary stage ride, some at much personal inconvenience and even pecuniary sacrifice, to perform what they considered a patriotic duty. Others, perhaps less patriotic and more ambitious, had come with visions of governorship, and the prospect of being U. S. Senator or Congressman, in their minds.

These delegates did not come to the convention, dear friends, dressed in buckskin suits, with belts about their bodies, in which were stuck revolvers and scalping knives; they did not come with rifles which they leaned against the corners of the room when they came in; neither were they dressed in jeans, corduroys, or butternuts, nor did they have feathers or hay-seed in their hair; when they spoke they did not use a mixed dialect of Indian and English. On the contrary, the delegates were a neatly and comfortably dressed body of men. They were not armed, and their language was probably as grammatical as that of any ordinary eastern Legislature. Many professions and avocations were represented;

ministers, lawyers, merchants, business men, and farmers. The convention was, in fact, composed of men above the average of men in ability and determination. The convention was not strictly legal, for the regular course would have been to have called it after Congress had passed "An Enabling Act." But the people thought, and probably with truth, that Congress refrained from doing so for political reasons; and they relied upon some former precedents, which they thought justified them in holding the convention to form a Constitution, which once formed and ratified by the people of the proposed State, they hoped would be recognized by Congress, and result in the erection of the southern portion of the Territory into a State.

There are many reasons why the inhabitants of a Territory should wish to have it made a State, especially when the population is quite large. The people have not many of the privileges of citizenship; they cannot elect their own governor or judges; they are represented in Congress only by a delegate, who has but little power or influence; they cannot vote for President of the United States. As many of the inhabitants of the Territories are citizens from the older States, in which they have enjoyed all the rights of citizenship, the denial of these privileges is irksome, and it is scarcely to be wondered that they claim their rights as soon as opportunity offers.

Harry was placed upon two important committees: that which had charge of railroad interests in the

Constitution, and that which had charge of Prohibition. He made his maiden speech when the clause pertaining to railroads was being discussed, radically opposing their efforts to secure special advantages in the new Constitution. Harry had, in his position in the office of the railroad company of New York, heard of some of the insidious workings and intrigues of a great company, and from what he had seen and heard he knew something of the great amount of meanness and selfishness in operation in such corporations; alas! often by men high up in social and church life, as well as in corporation offices; men to whom, in business transactions, the golden rule was obsolete. Where is the difference between them and the Pharisees and Sadducees, so terribly condemned of old by the Master? But mankind usually judges of men by their success, and however bad a man may be, if he succeeds in a worldly way, he will be toadied to by the self-seeking multitude. Harry's feelings being aroused on the subject, he made a strong and effective speech; a speech remembered against him by the railroad companies, who had their attorneys on the floor as delegates. The ladies occasionally attended the convention, sitting in the gallery. They were not there when Harry made his speech, but heard of it soon afterward.

"I am told your speech is very favorably spoken of and made quite a sensation," said Mrs. Noble to her son, when he returned home in the evening.

"I have a good deal of feeling, and considerable personal knowledge of the subject, mother, so I spoke earnestly, at any rate."

"I am pleased that you are on the right side, Harry; on the side of the people, and against selfish monopolies."

"I must add my congratulations, Harry," said Grace Constant, smiling and blushing; "I am very much pleased to hear your speech so favorably commented upon."

"Thank you, Grace," he replied, coloring to the temple; "but," he said, throwing off his embarrassment with an air of bravado, "I want you all to be in the convention when I make my great prohibition speech."

"And you are going to speak on prohibition, Harry?" said Grace; "I am so glad, I shall certainly be there."

"I am sure you can count upon us all being there," said Mrs. Noble.

"Yes, indeed!" said Minnie; "wouldn't miss it for any thing."

"I would be pleased to step aside for better speakers," said Harry; "but, unfortunately, the best speakers are on the other side, and, our side being the weakest, I feel that I must do the best I can."

"That is the true spirit, my son," said Mrs. Noble; "do the best you can."

One evening they were all sitting in the parlor of

their boarding house when two gentlemen called and inquired for Mrs. Noble. They were shown into the parlor. Mrs. Noble recognized the large figure, iron-gray hair, and large pleasant face of their neighbor, Judge Lamberton, at once, and gave him a cordial greeting, as the rest of the family were also pleased to do.

"A little business, madam, considerable curiosity, as well as an interest in the political situation, has been the cause of my visit to Sioux Falls at this time. Hearing that you and your charming family were here, I have done myself the pleasure of hunting you up and calling on you."

"I can assure you that we appreciate your kindness," said Mrs. Noble, with great suavity. "Be seated, gentlemen."

"First allow me to introduce a friend whom I have met here, Mr. Thomas Rushit Boom. Mr. Boom does not live here, and is visiting the place, he tells me, for about the same reasons that find me here at this time."

"That's so, judge, business and politics is what brings me here. How d'ye do? How d'ye do?" shaking hands all around.

Tom Rushit Boom, or Tom Boom, as he was generally called by his numerous acquaintances, was what is called a "rustler;" a keen, wide-awake, eastern man, who had come West to make money, in politics, town sites, booming the country, building railroads, or, in

fact, in any way so that he made it. He was a spare man, with light-brown hair, light-blue eyes, sallow complexion, sandy side whiskers and mustache. He was active and energetic in his movements. He used many extravagant and exaggerated expressions. He was a great traveler, going and coming all the time, full of political and business engagements.

"Permit me to congratulate you, Mr. Noble," said Judge Lamberton, when Tom Boom had subsided into a seat, "on the speech you made in the convention a few days ago. I have heard it spoken of in the most flattering terms."

"Thank you, judge," said Harry, getting very red in the face.

"If you came into this country to make money, you ought to be on the side of the railroads, though," said Tom Boom, energetically.

"Or fight them hard enough to make them buy you over," said Judge Lamberton, with a sardonic laugh.

"I am glad to say that my son acted entirely upon principle in the matter," said Mrs. Noble, with a good deal of dignity.

"O, yes, certainly," Judge Lamberton replied, hemming, and evidently somewhat embarrassed at the implied rebuke. Tom Boom's feelings, however, were not affected. He was opposed to Harry, both on the railroad question, and also on the prohibition

question. He expected to make both financial and political capital by opposing the reformers, and was bringing all the influence he could bear against them. Having heard, incidentally, that Judge Lamberton was acquainted with the Noble family, he expressed a wish, to the judge, to be introduced to them, hoping to influence Harry's opinion on these matters.

"Well, principle's a good thing—in the East, and people talk a good deal about it here, ma'am; but, as a general thing, when they come West, they go in for making money by hook or crook.

"If I have departed from my eastern principles since I have been West, I am not aware of it," said Harry.

"But it wont do, I tell you," rather warmly, and making many gestures as he continued: "Don't you see it wont; you want to cut a figure in politics; that's clear, or you wouldn't be here. Well, what's the first thing you do? make a red-hot speech against the railroads, and get them down on you; and I tell you, they have a big influence in politics. Then they say you are a red-hot prohibitionist, and likely to splash the liquor men with fire and brimstone when you speak on the subject. Of course you'll speak; these red-hot fellows can never keep still, and so you'll get the liquor men down on you. And they have a strong political influence, I can tell you. Now, just let me ask you how you ever expect to get along in politics with the railroads and whisky men down on you? You can never do it in the world."

"I'm no politician; I ask no odds from the railroads or the whisky men; I am fighting them simply because I think it my duty as a good Christian and a good citizen," with earnest indignation.

The others all listened with intense earnestness to the conversation.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Tom Boom, incredulously. "Well, you do ride a pretty high horse."

His own moral sense was so blunted and obtuse that he could not believe that Harry was entirely sincere.

"Now, see here. It wont do in this country," moving his chair up to Harry's, and placing his hand familiarly upon his shoulder and leaning toward him. "I like your looks, and I'll give you a little advice, free gratis. As I said before, people come to this country to make money. Now, the best way to do it is as I did; I'm what they call a rustler; head up, active, pushing, always looking out for the main chance, and keeping myself before the people. Know what I did when I first came here? went into a town-site scheme, borrowed, advertised, and rustled it through. Made \$25,000 on the rustle; wasn't bad, was it? Then I bought up a lot of cheap land, and got up a Christian colony on it; got the preachers into it, you know. I boomed and rustled that through. Didn't make quite as much as I expected on that scheme, though; only made \$15,000. But that wasn't so very bad, was it? Some of the colo-

nists were a little dissatisfied, must say ; so I rustled away from the colony," laughing. " Since then I have been rustling around a good deal, looking out for chances to make money ; have made several additions to boom towns, and have made money on every one. Buy up a few acres joining the town, you know, and sell them out in town lots. Have been in politics all the time, and rustled around a good deal in them. 'Tend all the conventions. Have been to the Territorial Legislature one term. When southern Dakota's made a State my chances are about as good as any one's for an office. I run a county newspaper, and own a flour mill. I tell you I've rustled and rustled around in this Territory until I have got something."

" Your rustling has certainly not been without tangible results," said Harry.

" Keep your eyes open, and keep rustling around. Jump at a good chance and rustle it through. Rustle and rustle, and keep yourself before the people all the time ; that's the way to do it. But do you suppose my rustling would have amounted to any thing if I had got on a high horse and talked about principle, Christianity, being a good citizen, and all that ? "

" You might not have accomplished so much, but you would have felt better about what you had gained," Harry replied.

" Felt better ! " rather astonished ; " I feel good

enough. Now let me tell you, it's all well enough to talk about the railroads being grinding monopolies, and all that, to please the people; but just tip the railroads the wink at the same time, and slip a harmless-looking clause into your Constitution, that will suck the milk out of reform. It's all well enough to talk prohibition, but wink at the whisky men, and tell the people prohibition can never be enforced, that high license is better, or that you think beer is not intoxicating and should not be prohibited. Don't you see you make friends of both parties in that way, and make votes, too! O, I tell you, I have rustled around until I've learned something about human nature."

"You evidently understand *some* kinds of human nature well," said Judge Lamberton; and, as he thought the subject had continued long enough, he adroitly changed it, and managed to lead the conversation into other channels during the remainder of their call.

"I do not think you made much headway with Harry Noble," said Judge Lamberton, as they walked to their hotel. "He is a young man of fine principles, and considerable force of character; his mother and the young ladies exert a good influence over him of a high character."

"Yes; the old lady and the girls are a great hinderance to him. Is the old woman a widow?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Rather sweet on her, aint you?"

"I really do not know why I have given you occasion to think so," said the judge, rather hesitatingly.

"Know something about human nature, you see," laughing loudly.

One evening the Noble family were surprised to receive a call from Peter Bigman.

"This certainly is an unexpected pleasure," said Grace Constant, when receiving him. "We thought you could not leave your ranch."

"I got lonesome when your family left, and being curious to see a Constitutional Convention in a Territory, I made up my mind that I would steal time enough to come to Sioux Falls."

"How are the neighbors?" Mrs. Noble inquired.

"Miss Foundit is extremely well, but she complains of feeling lonely whenever I see her, and, being her nearest neighbor, she often comes over to see me. She has been right kind, too; for she has insisted several times in putting my shanty to rights, and it certainly needed it. Mrs. Snow and her children are well, too, but the children are getting about as wild as prairie chickens. Rev. John Landhunter is employing the greater part of his time in trying to organize a church at Land View. I understand that the Church Extension Society of his denomination has promised to aid the new church liberally."

"I suppose our claims are all right?" inquired Harry.

"Yes. Indeed, I have run up there quite often, and left every thing all right. Pat Brislin sleeps there at night."

"It is very kind in you to take such a neighborly interest in our affairs," said Mrs. Noble, "and we feel greatly obliged to you."

"O, no, not at all! It affords me great pleasure to do any thing I can for you or your family."

"May I inquire how you are succeeding with your ranch?" said Mr. Noble.

"I am doing very well, thank you. It's a rough kind of life, but I like it, and my health is much improved by it. I am adding to the number of cattle all the time. My ranch is a small one now, but I expect it to be a big one in a few years. There's lots of money in it when once going right."

"I hope you will succeed," said Mrs. Noble; "you have my best wishes."

"I will succeed, ma'am; always do if I set my mind to it."

Although Peter Bigman had come to attend the convention, he evidently did not care to spend all his time there. Whenever he could contrive to be in the company of the ladies, he did so. He was a frequent caller at the house. Sometimes, when an escort was necessary, he was allowed to make himself useful. His manner toward Grace was kind and friendly, but he made no open advances for her favor.

One day they made arrangements to attend the Minnehaha County fair, which was in session, with Harry. At the last moment he was prevented from going by committee business. Peter Bigman pressed his services upon them. As they were extremely anxious to attend the fair, his services were accepted, but reluctantly. They expected to go in one of the omnibuses which were constantly running to the fair grounds, but at the appointed time Peter Bigman drove up with a handsome pair of horses and carriage.

"I am sorry you have put yourself to this expense, Mr. Bigman," said Mrs. Noble.

"It's nothing; I can afford it," with a very complacent air.

Arrived at the fair grounds they went to examine the vegetable products, for they had some doubts in their minds about the country being a good one for vegetables, it being so far north, and having such long, cold winters. They were agreeably surprised at the specimens displayed; for although the people did not take the interest in the fair they should for the good of the county, yet the display was very encouraging as to the possibilities of the country. While they were looking at the vegetables, Jacob Shark, the land agent, came up, and accosted them very pleasantly.

"Dakota can do some fine things in the way of vegetables, ma'am," he said. "They grow very large,

particularly roots of every kind. What do you think of twenty-five-pound beets, six-pound potatoes, two-pound onions, and hundred-pound squashes! We claim to raise such things here," stroking his black mustache, patronizingly.

"Dakota improves upon acquaintance with it," said Mrs. Noble.

"Should think it did. I was out riding with your son the other day, ma'am, and showed him some claims I have for sale. Only make two and a half per cent. commission."

His cunning black eyes twinkled.

"One of them was a bargain, a regular bonanza. Did he tell you about it? Do you think it would suit your friend in the East?"

"I have just received a letter from my friend," Mrs. Noble replied, "and I am sorry to say he has met with a misfortune in his financial affairs, and says he cannot now invest in Dakota, as he had hoped to do."

"Ugh!" grunted Jacob Shark, his countenance falling perceptibly, and a scowl covering his face.

Directly he walked away. After that he was scarcely able to recognize any of the Noble family when he met them on the street. He had discovered that he could make no profit from them, consequently his interest ceased in them.

"How d'ye do," said Tom Boom, rustling up to them after Jacob Shark had left. "Glad to see you.

What do you think of our vegetables? Fine, aint they? Can grow any thing in Dakota. Finest country sun ever shone on. Better write to all your friends to come on from the East. Goin' to stop and see the races? No! Better; lots of fun. Will make a small bet with you to make it interesting. No! Good-bye, then. I'm rustling around here, making new acquaintances and meeting old ones. Fine thing to know every body, you know, in politics," winking his light, blue, crafty eye. "See that squash. Big, aint it? Ever hear of the man in Douglas County who wanted to ride to the Missouri River, twenty-five miles? He just laid down on the vine of a squash, and it grew so fast in the night that he was at the river in the morning. Ha, ha, ha! Good one, aint it? Well, good-bye again."

The fair grounds now began to fill up with wagons, sulkies, carriages, omnibuses, vehicles of all kinds, and crowds of people to see the races; so the Noble family thought it time to withdraw, and drove home.

A special day had been set apart by the convention for the consideration and discussion of putting a prohibitory clause in the Constitution. The temperance organizations of the Territory had mustered their forces, and had been using all honorable endeavors to enlist the delegates upon the side of prohibition, but the liquor party was very strong, and delegates who were in favor of it, as a matter of con-

science, wavered upon the question of advocating it or voting upon it as a measure of public policy, fearing to lose political influence; and some openly said, "That a Constitution having radical reforms in it would not be ratified by Congress;" confessing the humiliating fact that the representatives of all the States, "in Congress assembled," would not be equaled in moral tone by the latest aspirant to the sisterhood of States. Notwithstanding the weak-kneed policy of some of its friends, the leaders of the prohibition movement were determined to fight for the measure with a determination and fearless boldness that many termed fanatical. But no great reform was ever consummated without what the world terms fanaticism. When, however, the reform has won, the fickle world is ever ready to glorify the "fanatics." How fully this truth has been exemplified in the fight against slavery! Derided, scorned, persecuted, branded as insane "fanatics" at the beginning, the honored few who dared to lead, later had their brows crowned with laurel, and a grateful nation has laid immortelles upon some of their graves. Doubtless such, also, will be the history of those who lead against the more insidious sin of intemperance.

The women of the Territory took, perhaps, a stronger interest in the question than the men, and well they might, for women and children are the greatest sufferers from the demon drink. The women,

dressed in their best array, and wearing their sweetest smiles, crowded the gallery, determined to use all their influence to encourage the champions of their cause. They were armed with small bouquets, which they freely showered down upon the advocates of prohibition. But it was an uneven fight from the first. The oldest heads, the brightest minds, the best speakers, all seemed to be against the cause, from policy and other selfish reasons. The ladies in the gallery might scatter their smiles and shower their bouquets; it seemed to do no good.

Harry arose to make his speech in the afternoon. Strengthened by an approving conscience, encouraged by the approving smiles of mother and sister, and of her whom he loved, he threw his whole soul into his speech. Strong in facts and argument, able, fervent, impassioned in delivery, he gained the attention of every hearer, and was frequently interrupted by applause. His closing appeal for the delegates to cast aside policy and selfish considerations and vote with their consciences for the future welfare of their homes, and "to cast out the serpent which threatened to poison the manhood of their sons," was very impressive. When he sat down there was first a brief, thoughtful silence, followed by a burst of applause and a perfect storm of bouquets. Delegates leaned toward each other, and said, "Splendid speech, rising young man, eloquent speaker; that young man will make his mark," etc. The ladies' heads in the gallery

were grouped together in knots, some leaning forward over the backs of the seats, and others twisting themselves half around and leaning backward to speak to those behind them. They congratulated themselves in having such an advocate for their cause, and their hopes ran high that it would win.

The vote was taken. The prohibitory clause was defeated. With discouraged looks the temperance people left the hall, but even in their discouragement said, "The fight must go on until the good cause wins." The liquor party were jubilant.

Afterward the convention, fearing to lose entirely the vote and influence of the temperance people, put a clause into the Constitution, providing that the first Legislature, upon the petition of five thousand voters, make a prohibitory amendment to the Constitution, to be accepted or rejected by the people. But the prohibitionists considered this but a sop thrown to them for their influence, which the means would be found to evade, and received the new Constitution coldly and worked for it meagerly.

The next morning Harry was standing on the pavement, on Phillips Avenue, talking with Tom Boom, whom he had just met, and who had accosted him in his usually hearty manner. As they were conversing, Harry observed an uncouth figure walking up street toward them. A man of medium height, wearing an old slouch hat, very rusty looking, pulled far down on his head, the brim turned down and flap-

ping in his face; shaggy brown hair, protruding below the hat in an unkempt fringe; much tanned, wrinkled face, with a short, brown, grizzly, full beard; small, active, gray eyes, with a humorous twinkle in them. He was dressed in a gray jean coat and pants; check shirt with a wide collar, open at the throat; and dusty, rusty, wrinkled, cow-hide boots with thick soles. He leaned forward as he walked, and his gait was a sort of hitching saunter.

He seemed to know Tom Boom. Every body seemed to know Tom Rushit Boom.

"How d'ye do, Tom? Shake!" stretching out a bony, tanned hand, none too clean; in fact, he was none too clean all over.

Tom shook hands with him. "How d'ye do, Jack?" he inquired.

"Purty well, thank ye. Wife well?" with a smile, and humorous twinkle of his eyes.

"Quite well."

"Children well?"

"O, yes."

"Crops good?"

"Yes; what I have."

"Boomin' things?"

"Tryin' to."

"Makin' money?"

"Yes; a little."

"Enjoy religion?"

"Much as I ever did."

"Guess that's so," laughing.

Tom Boom having become tired of answering personal questions, turned to Harry and introduced him to Jack Lucky, "one of the old settlers."

"Glad to see ye, sir. Shake!"

"How long have you been in Dakota?" Harry inquired.

"Ten years; nigh abouts."

"Well, you have been in the country long enough to know something about it. How do you like it? And how have you made out?"

"It's a purty good country, but I've not made out very well. See! I came here when there was nothin' much but Injuns and grasshoppers; had a wagon load full of youngsters; dumped them out on the prairie, and started a farm; had nothin', and got nothin' much but hard luck; was eat out three times with the grasshoppers, and had hard times ginerally. Doin' a little better now; land's worth sumthin'. But I tell ye the old settlers had a hard time ginerally. But I'm goin' to the store. Mornin'!" and he hitched and sauntered away.

When the convention was over the Noble family returned home, glad, notwithstanding the comforts which they enjoyed, to travel toward Nobleton, for they remembered their little red houses as their home with affectionate regard. Peter Bigman accompanied them, having remained with them to the last.

CHAPTER XIII.

Return to Nobleton after the convention—A pleasant surprise—Mrs. Noble's loss—Proving up preemption claims—Richard Moneycounter's offer and refusal.

ON the 20th of September the Noble family left Plankinton, by wagon, for Land View. Pat Brislin had driven Harry's wagon up for them. Richard Moneycounter, hearing that they would return on that day, had also driven to Plankinton with a buggy, and invited Grace Constant to ride back with him, which invitation she felt constrained to accept, because the wagon was very heavily loaded. Peter Bigman scowled at this, and was very uncommunicative during the whole ride. Harry endeavored to preserve his usual flow of spirits, but the effort was evidently forced.

It was a clear, cool, crisp morning; there had been a cool snap this month, and some frost. The gentlemen found overcoats very comfortable, and the ladies wore heavy shawls. But there was exhilaration in the cold. The sun shone brightly, the sky was sapphire; the cold air brought the rich crimson to their cheeks, and brightness to their eyes. The horses felt it, too, for they moved briskly, with heads erect and ears up.

Arrived at Land View, they stopped a few minutes at the hotel, and their friends and acquaintances soon gathered in to welcome them back. When they were about starting again Grace Constant thought she might ride to Nobleton in the wagon, and so expressed herself, not wishing to have Richard Moneycounter's politeness force him to drive farther on her account. Peter Bigman thought there was plenty of room in the wagon, and Harry, graciously thanking Mr. Moneycounter for his kindness in lightening their load, thought that they could make room for one more without discomfort for the remaining short distance of their journey.

But Richard Moneycounter politely persisted in saying that he would not, on any account, forego the pleasure of the remainder of the ride; that it was not in accordance with his ideas of politeness to invite a young lady to ride with him, and then, when the journey was partly finished, crowd her into a wagon with her friends; so he smilingly handed Grace into the buggy again, and she as smilingly accepted the courtesy. Although the other two gentlemen saw that she could not politely do otherwise, they both wore disappointed looking visages.

But soon they came in sight of Nobleton; the three red shanties on the hill looked very natural, and their hearts bounded at the sight of them. It was their home. The green grass of the prairie had turned dry and yellow, and there was not the strong

contrast of the red of the houses and the green of the grass that there had been. Autumn had thrown her mantle over the land; the prairie flowers were all gone; still it was home—their home.

As they drew near Mrs. Noble's house they saw an inscription over the door, done on a piece of muslin, in an amateur style—"WELCOME HOME," and as the wagon drove up to the house the door burst wide open and out rushed all the little Snows, dressed in their best, shouting "Welcome home! Welcome home!" followed by Mrs. Snow, all smiles, dressed in a new dark-colored calico dress and white apron; Miss Foundit, dressed in pale pink, her hair done up artistically, and adorned with an artificial yellow rose; Rev. John Landhunter, dressed in his clerical, black broadcloth; and Judge Lamberton, dressed in a dark suit. They all gathered around the wagon, shaking hands, laughing and wishing them "Welcome home," the children clambering up the wheels and into the wagon.

"You see, Mrs. Noble, we have jumped your claim and are in full possession," said Fanny Foundit, laughing. "Walk right in and make yourself at home, we will try and give you a bite to eat after your long ride."

As they entered the house they saw the table set, with a good meal, the whole length of the house—through the two rooms.

"Well, really! I am so surprised and delighted at

your thoughtful, neighborly kindness that I am quite at a loss how to express my thanks," said Mrs. Noble.

"Never mind the thanks; take off your things, and get your dinner," said Fanny Foundit, vigorously assisting her to take off her wraps.

"Well, this is just the nicest surprise," exclaimed Harry, heartily. "Hurrah for you, Miss Foundit; for I expect you are at the bottom of it. Shake!"

"Well, Mrs. Snow and I did get it up," shaking hands with him, and laughing.

"But that is hardly the language to thank a lady in," said Mrs. Noble, trying in vain to look a little severe.

"How good of you, Mrs. Snow, to come up here with all your children and work so hard to give us such a pleasant surprise," said Grace Constant.

"O, it's nothin'," her fingers beginning to twitch the corner of her white apron convulsively, and her eyes beginning to look watery. "It's nothin' compared to your kindness to me and my little Snow birdies."

"Well, let's eat; I feel as lank as a June shad. I tell you, a morning ride over these prairies after a frost gives a man appetite enough to eat a grindstone," said Harry.

They were soon all seated at the table, little Snows and all. Harry requested the minister to ask a blessing, which he did; thanking the kind Father for his protecting care of the family, their safe return,

and the pleasant re-union, which they were now enjoying."

It is needless to say that all around that happy board enjoyed a hearty meal, laughing and joking over the surprise meanwhile.

"I am delighted to be on my claim at this time," said Judge Lamberton. "I would not on any account have missed this pleasant occasion."

"I cannot but congratulate myself, that the best of it all is, that our lot has been cast among such kind friends and good neighbors," said Mrs. Noble, with much feeling.

"I think I have good neighbors, too," said Peter Bigman, falling in, to some extent, with the feelings natural to the occasion; still having a disappointed feeling that he was not the center and object of the ovation.

"Well, I never expected to find such good friends on the prairies of Dakota," said Minnie.

After the dinner was cleared away Peter Bigman asked Grace Constant if she would not join him in a duet; she graciously consented, and they entertained the company for some time with such melody as one would not look for on the frontier. Afterward Grace took the little Snows out for a walk down to the lane, and to see the animals, and they had a right good time together. There were pleasant good-byes, hand-shakings, invitations to call soon, when the company took their departure. After they had all

gone, and the sun was sinking in the west, Mrs. Noble and all the family, again and again, expressed their delight and appreciation of the kindness of their neighbors.

The autumn had now fully arrived and Harry made preparations for the winter; his crop, from his small breaking, had been gathered in, principally seed corn and potatoes. The crop was remarkably good for a first one on ground that, but a few months ago, had been a wild prairie; the potatoes and beans were very good, and quite a welcome addition to the family larder. During the fall months, Harry, by the use of his gun, kept the table well supplied with game: ducks from the lake, mallard, and teal; plover and prairie chickens; occasionally a crane or two would be seen flying over the country, or wading with its long legs in the lake. The chickens had increased to quite a little flock, and kept them well supplied with eggs; but the calf had grown too large for a plaything for the little Snows, who were now somewhat afraid of her.

According to the United States land laws they could now "prove up" on their preemption claims and become owners of them. But a misfortune occurred to Mrs. Noble in the beginning of October that delayed them in doing so. When going to church, one Sunday, in Land View, she carried her money with her, as was her custom when all the family left Nobleton. Upon their return she discovered that she had not the money; it was gone. She at once

told the family of her loss, and a most diligent search was made of her dress and about the house; then Harry went out and searched the wagon, but it was not in it. He then hitched up his team, and taking the young ladies with him, drove slowly to Land View, searching the road carefully, going and returning; but the grass was long and thick, and if the money had been lost there, it would be almost impossible to find it. At Land View they searched the place where church had been held, and the hotel where they stopped, but they could not find it, or get any trace of it. Harry told his friends of their loss, wrote a notice and tacked it up on the office wall of the hotel, and told the editor of the Land View paper to insert a notice in his next issue, offering a reward for the return of the money. Upon their return they found Mrs. Noble seriously distressed and perplexed; and putting aside their own anxiety, they set about comforting her.

"Don't mind it, mother," said Harry, "likely it will turn up in some unexpected place or be found and returned to us; this is an honest country, you know."

"I hope so, my son, but I do not think it will be found in some unexpected place, for I remember distinctly putting it in my dress just before we went to church. It must be lost, although I cannot see how it could happen; I do hope some honest person will find it and return it."

"Do not let this trouble you so much, auntie," said Grace Constant. "We all feel more badly to see you troubled than at the loss of the money," giving her an affectionate kiss.

"Yes, indeed; so don't worry, mother dear," said Minnie, in a cheerful tone.

"Even if it is lost we will pull through without it," said Harry.

"It would seem unkind, indeed, if after your kind words, my children, I should unduly distress myself about this loss. So I shall leave the whole matter in the hands of our heavenly Father, who doeth all things well."

All efforts proved unavailing to find the lost money.

Richard Moneycounter was quite a frequent caller at Nobleton, and the whole family liked him. On his next visit, shortly after Mrs. Noble's loss, he expressed the deepest concern at her misfortune, and offered his services to help her in any way that he could.

After he had gone the family held a consultation, discussing whether to borrow money of Richard Moneycounter for the purpose of proving up their claims. It was quite customary for the persons who were too poor to pay for claims to borrow the money for that purpose. Mrs. Noble said she favored doing so, for the reason that the claims, once in their possession, there was no danger of their being

jumped; and further, they might borrow enough in addition to pay their expenses for the winter, which they expected to pay with part of the money which they had lost. "Indeed," she said, in conclusion, "I cannot see how we are going to get along without borrowing money, for there is no way of making money in the winter in this country."

"You're right, mother," said Harry, "but I don't like to be under obligations to Richard Moneycounter, or any other person."

"If any other plan could be thought of, I should think it might be much better," said Grace Constant.

"But, children," said Mrs. Noble, earnestly, "it is a very plain fact that we must have money soon, and I really do not know of any person but Mr. Moneycounter from whom we can get it. Then it seems to me that he is as about as unobjectionable a person to borrow money from as any person I ever met; and I do not think that the sense of obligation need be very great, for we give him good security on our land after we prove up, and will pay him the usual rate of interest."

"What you say is all very true, auntie," said Grace Constant; "but it seems to me that our pleasant, friendly relations with Mr. Moneycounter will be somewhat strained if he becomes our money-lender. I wish you could borrow of some other person."

"I, too," said Harry; "but I really must say I do not know of another person from whom we could borrow the necessary amount."

"I don't see why Mr. Moneycounter cannot be our banker as well as any other person; I like him," said Minnie.

Finally Harry and Grace ceased their opposition, and it was agreed that Harry should go to Land View on the morrow and endeavor to obtain the necessary loan.

Harry accordingly went to Land View the next day, and had an interview with Richard Moneycounter. That gentleman received him very affably, and as soon as he had made his errand known, at once acceded to his wishes, agreeing to lend him the money, and offering his services, if needed, in proving the claims.

Harry was gratified with the result of the interview, and it lifted an anxiety from the minds of the whole family, for now they would be able to secure their claims beyond a peradventure. It was necessary for Mrs. Noble, Minnie, and Harry to go to Yankton to prove up their claims, and as Grace Constant could not or did not care to be left alone, she went with them. There were two wagon loads, the other wagon containing witnesses to their residence and settlement, which the law required.

Arrived at Yankton they went to the Merchant's Hotel, a comfortable and quite large three-story

brick building. They noticed a pile of large sample trunks in front of the hotel.

When Harry went into the hotel to register, his old acquaintance, Wash Huntbiz, the Chicago drummer, rushed up to him all smiles.

"Why, how d'ye do. Shake! Remember me, don't you? Of course you do. Slept with you at the ranch. Awful bed! Awful storm! Caught dreadful bad cold! Met you going to Sioux Fall to Constitutional Convention last month. Remember? Now meet you again. Travel 'most as much as I do. Ladies always with you! What brings you here now?"

"We came to prove up our claims."

"Don't say so! Well, it's a good thing. Going to prove up on my claim next month."

"How can you take up a claim; I thought you was traveling all the time?" Harry inquired.

"O, it's my legal residence, you see! Man must have a residence somewhere," winking.

"How do you get all your big trunks into your claim shanty?"

"O, I only take my grip when I go to my shanty; don't stay there long, you know! "By the way, one of my trunks is big enough for a claim shanty—set it up on one end—don't you think so? Ha, ha, ha!"

The Noble family accomplished their business at the United States Land-office very pleasantly and suc-

cessfully. Indeed, there was no good reason why they should not, for they had lived on the land and cultivated it for six months, and had witnesses there to prove these facts. Their drive home was a pleasant one, and they felt that the Nobles were now, indeed, possessors of homes of their own. One hundred and sixty acres each of good, rich, Dakota soil, besides the three claims, one hundred and sixty acres each more, which in time, by complying with the law, would become as fully theirs as the preemption claims. As they approached the red houses of Nobleton they felt more than ever that they were now in full possession of desirable homes.

Richard Moneycounter's visits to Nobleton became more and more frequent, and when the family went to Land View to church, or for other purposes, they always met him, and he always made himself very agreeable; did not in any way make them feel that they were under obligations to him. But although he was courteous with all, his preference for Grace Constant and his attentions to her became more marked. He seldom was able to see her alone; she avoided that, as it was easy to do with their limited house room. But, nevertheless, he made her feel and caused the others to observe that she was the object of his attentions. Peter Bigman noticed it very soon, and when Richard Moneycounter was present, the old scowl would settle with more or less distinctness on his brow. When he could do so he would persuade

her to the melodeon, and once there he felt that, for a time, at least, she was safe from falling into the toils of his rival. Richard Moneycounter had sufficient control of his feelings to hide them, and thus had the advantage of Peter Bigman; for if he thought he did not prosper with his suit as he wished, he was able to conceal his disappointment.

Harry, although annoyed by the banker's persistence, liked him, and did not feel that he was likely to capture Grace's affections. The banker was a man who did not like to be long in suspense, and made up his mind that he would hazard his affections on a direct offer, thinking, perhaps, that Grace esteemed him sufficiently, and would see the advantages of the offer plainly enough to accept him; so one day Harry brought a letter for Grace, regularly mailed to her, from Land View. The address was written in a bold free hand. Harry wondered who could be Grace's correspondent, and what his business, but he made no remarks as he handed her the letter. She read it when first she was alone. It was from Richard Moneycounter, expressed his admiration and love for her, and offering her his hand and heart. Grace called Mrs. Noble and handed her the letter. Mrs. Noble read it carefully, and then, looking earnestly at Grace, inquired:

"What answer will you give, dear?"

"There is but one answer I can give, auntie; I

admire him, enjoy his friendship, but beyond that, nothing."

That was the answer she wrote him, kindly declining the offer, but expressing the wish to remain his friend.

He accepted her decision philosophically, and remained her friend.

CHAPTER XIV.

Indian summer—A conversation—The prairie on fire—Nobleton in ruins—A home with the Snows—A new Nobleton—Proposals renewed.

IT was November now, and the most delightful season of the year in the North-west—Indian summer. For about six weeks the weather was most charming. The nights were quite cold, and in the morning the prairie was covered with a thick white frost. The sun rose brightly, but shone through a dreamy haze, with a dull, reddish look. The middle of the day was quite warm, the afternoon pleasant, the evening cool. All nature seemed peaceful, dreamy, languid, as if soothing herself, gently, before dropping off into her winter sleep. It seemed to the Noble family the perfection of weather, and they enjoyed it to its fullest extent.

One afternoon Harry had gone to Land View, and Minnie to help Mrs. Snow. Mrs. Noble and Grace Constant were sitting outside of the house, on the shady side, Mrs. Noble reading and Grace Constant sewing. Mrs. Noble looked very contented and motherly, dressed in a dove-colored merino dress, and wearing one of those charming lace caps trimmed with small, pink ribbons. Grace was dressed in a

rich, dark-blue merino, with a white ribbon at her throat. Her dress fitted her shapely figure well. Both ladies had the bloom of health upon their cheeks. Evidently Dakota agreed with them; it had worked wonders for Mrs. Noble.

How remarkable to the denizens of a city to find these well-dressed cultured ladies living on the prairie. Yet how many pale-faced, nervous ladies of the city would be beautified by a few months of prairie life.

"I have been thinking, auntie," said Grace Constant, dropping her sewing into her lap, "how happy we have been on the prairie, and how well we have succeeded."

"Yes, dear; we have great occasion to be thankful, for we have certainly done remarkably well," gazing fondly at Grace with her dark, soft, hazel eyes.

"But that is not all I have been thinking about, auntie dear; I have been thinking of how good and kind you have been to me for so many years; taking care of the poor orphan girl, and loving her as your own. Indeed, I often feel as if you were my real mother, and Minnie and Harry were my brother and sister." As she spoke she gazed earnestly and tenderly at Mrs. Noble with her large, dark-blue, gentle, liquid eyes, beaming with love.

"I am most happy that you feel thus toward me and my children," Mrs. Noble replied, "for that is

the exact state of feeling I have endeavored to inspire, by tenderly loving you and caring for you ever since you came to me a poor orphan. But I assure you, dear, it has required no effort on my part, for my heart went out to you when I first saw you, and I am sure Harry and Minnie love you as brother and sister."

"I know all this," slightly blushing; "I had been blind and deaf did I not know it. I do not know how I can ever repay you all for your goodness to me," her head slightly drooping.

"Do not speak of repaying us, dear; you have already repaid us a thousand times by your thoughtful care and assistance. I do not like the language of the market when used in relation to matters of the heart. Love is not commercial, and it can only be recompensed in kind by love and actions spontaneously flowing from a loving heart."

"I acknowledge the rebuke, auntie dear, but I do not mean to repay you in a commercial sense, for you know that I cannot do that; but, nevertheless, my sense of gratitude is very great, and, as far as it is able, my heart is repaying love for love. It would also give expression, if it could, by showering down all the good things of this world upon you and your family."

"I am glad you love us so much, dear," said Mrs. Noble, rising, stooping over her, and kissing her. "You know our love for you. I think I see Harry's wagon coming in the distance, let us go in and prepare supper."

Harry, in his leisure hours, had constructed a rude boat to navigate the lake, and these pleasant Indian summer evenings, when it was moonlight, they would all get into it and have a row, Peter Bigman frequently making it convenient to be there, to help Harry with the oars.

One evening they were slowly rowing over the lake, barely moving, that was all, the moon shining clearly down into the placid water, when the conversation turned to prairie fires.

"I hope we shall have none here," said Harry; "but I am not very much afraid if they do come, for I have taken lessons from some of the old settlers in making fire-brakes, and have made them by plowing several furrows around the houses, the barn, and the hay-stack, so I think we are all right."

"I hope so," said Peter Bigman, "for I have them, too; but I am told they sometimes fail."

"Not often, unless there is a very high wind," Harry replied.

"I think the sky looks redder in one spot over there in the west," pointing, "than any where else," said Grace Constant; "perhaps it is the reflection of a prairie fire on the sky."

"It may be," said Harry. "I think it looks smoky over there, too. Well, it is a good night for it; there is hardly any wind, and it can do us no harm."

They remained on the lake an hour longer, then

went home and retired, Peter Bigman leaving them at the door.

Harry looked out of his window toward the west before he went to bed, but the red spot on the sky looked about the same, and there was no wind. But about two o'clock he was suddenly awakened by a bright light shining through the window full on his face; the wind was blowing a hurricane. He jumped up and looked out of the window. The prairie was a wall of fire, rushing down upon them, chased by a fierce wind. The wind blew pieces of burning grass before it for long distances, and Harry saw at a glance that there was little hope of saving Nobleton, for the flying, burning grass would overleap his fire-brakes.

He hastily pulled on part of his clothing, and running over to Minnie's house, pounded on the door, calling loudly, "Fire! Minnie, get up as fast as you can! The prairie fire is on us!" Then rushing to his mother's house, gave the alarm, pounding the door, yelling at the top of his voice, for all of them to hurry up, for their lives were in danger. In a very few moments Minnie, Mrs. Noble, and Grace all ran out of their houses, partly dressed, and Harry hurried them down to the lake, for the fire was close upon them, and he was afraid some of the burning grass would set fire to the prairie between them and the lake, and cut off their retreat to the only place of safety. They ran as fast as they could, jumped

into the boat, Puck with them, barking loudly, and Harry pushed out into the middle of the lake. They were none too soon, for the hay-stack was already beginning to burn, and the roofs of the houses, and the grass between the houses and the lake, had caught fire. Quickly the fire spread all around the lake, and it seemed to them the world was on fire, and they only rescued. Rapidly the houses burned down, and the stable, with the poor horses, cow, and calf, every thing was destroyed. There they sat, partly clad, in the rough boat on the little lake, and saw their small possessions consumed in fire and smoke. It was a disappointing, heart-sickening ordeal. Were all their hopes to be destroyed?

“Thank God, our lives are saved!” were the first words Mrs. Noble gave utterance to after the great danger was over.

After the prairie fire had swept by, with its glare of light and heat, they began to feel cold, for they had saved but little of their clothing, and nothing else, excepting a small valise, which Mrs. Noble hastily snatched up as she fled from her doomed house.

Harry had saved so few clothes that he could part with none to protect his shivering mother, but the young ladies shared what they could of the poor remainder of their wardrobes with her, notwithstanding her earnest remonstrances and declarations that they needed them as much or more than she did.

“No, you must take them, auntie dear,” said

Grace, firmly; "remember that Minnie and I are much younger than you are, and even if we do not take cold, we shall suffer less severely than you would."

As soon as it was safe Harry pushed the boat ashore and landed on the black and forbidding prairie. They slowly walked up the hill to where Nobleton but such a short time ago had stood. It was all gone now. Not a stick to show where the houses stood, and the site of the stable marked only by the carcasses of the burned animals.

The moon was sinking in the west, and they all felt very sadly as they stood in a solitary group on the burned prairie beside what had been but such a very short time ago their poor but happy homes.

Minnie cried bitterly. Mrs. Noble tried to steel herself against giving away to her emotions, that she might be an example to the others; but she was forced to brush away a few quiet tears, as did Grace Constant. Harry, too, felt very much like forgetting his manliness in tears; but he remembered that he was the man of the family, and braced himself up against them.

"Every thing wiped out!" he exclaimed, at last. "Clean gone! The houses we can rebuild again, but the poor animals we cannot restore. Never mind, mother; never mind, girls. You know we came West expecting to have rough times, and I think this is a fair sample of them," with a grim humor. "But

we can't stay here; we must go somewhere, and walk, too. How fast the fire sweeps in this fierce wind! See, it is blazing away over there in the horizon."

"Where shall we go, Harry?" Grace inquired.

"I hardly know myself. Our neighbors over in that direction must be as badly off as we are," pointing, "and one of them is Rev. John Landhunter; but I think the fire has not reached so far in that direction," pointing, "as the wind was not right for it."

"Why, over there is where Mrs. Snow and Miss Foundit and Mr. Bigman live," said Grace. "I do hope and pray that those poor women and children are not burned out. I do not know how they could escape with their lives if the fire came as unexpectedly upon them as it did upon us."

"We will start over instantly," said Mrs. Noble. "We must not stand here idly bemoaning our loss, when perhaps we may be able to assist those who may be more helpless than we are."

They hurried toward Mrs. Snow's, with many wishes that the poor woman and her children had escaped. But before they arrived at her house their fears were relieved, for they found that her claim had not been in the path of the fire. They went to her door and knocked, greatly startling Mrs. Snow, for the tired woman and her active children slept soundly. When Harry told her who were there she soon opened the door, partially dressed. Great was her

surprise and grief to hear of their loss and narrow escape.

"Poor things!" she said, wiping her eyes; "I can't do much for you; but what a poor widow has you are welcome to. Just make my little house your home until you can do better. I wish I had a palace to offer you. Why, you must be cold, with only those few things on that you saved. Never mind, I'll soon have a fire built and warm you up."

She soon had a bright wood-fire burning, and not only warmed them, but made a pot of coffee, a cup of which did much to warm and cheer them amid the discomforts of the night. The unusual noise waked the children up at an unusually early hour, and they crawled out of their little beds and huddled about in their night clothes with many childish expressions of wonder and surprise about the fire, and asking many questions. Many were the expressions of pity which they uttered, especially when they heard of the burning of the live stock.

"Poor horses! poor cow! and poor itte calf! all burned to death!"

Very early Miss Foundit came over to Mrs. Snow's, for she had seen the fire the night before.

"O, I'm so sorry for you all!" she said, when she found the Nobles there. "I was afraid it would come over to my shanty, too, and I was so frightened that I did not know what to do until it passed by, then I began to breathe once more."

Soon Peter Bigman came in. He expressed much sorrow at the loss of the Noble family, but seemed in a secret glow of satisfaction that he himself had escaped with his property.

"I saw it burning over your way," he said to Harry, "and I was dreadfully afraid I would be burned out, too; I really don't know what I should have done if I had been, but then I generally have pretty good luck."

He was, however, gracious enough to offer his services, if any thing could be done. They thanked him, but did not know of any thing at present that could be done.

"Where every thing is wiped out, as ours have been," said Harry, "there is nothing to take care of."

"If I only had a house big enough I should be glad to take you all in," said Peter Bigman.

"My house is their home until they can get a better one," said Mrs. Snow.

"They're comin' to live with us; aint that nice?" shouted one of the children.

"Yes, indeed," cried another; "but wont we have fun?"

"One thing's certain," said Mrs. Snow, with a faint smile, "you are not likely to get lonesome or very low spirited while you have my Snow birdies to entertain you."

"Bless the little dears," said Grace; "they will certainly drive away dull care."

Miss Foundit made a trip over to her shanty and returned with some clothes for the ladies; thus drawing on her own and Mrs. Snow's wardrobe, she succeeded in making them tolerably comfortable. Peter Bigman brought one of his coats for Harry, which was much too small for him, but at least kept him warm. Mrs. Snow got breakfast ready, the ladies helping her and dressing the children.

While at breakfast Rev. John Landhunter came in. He had had a narrow escape, and had lost every thing but the few clothes he had on. He told of a number of other settlers who had been burned out, and were actually suffering. "I am going to Land View for help," he said.

"I will hitch up my team and go with you," said Peter Bigman.

"I will go, too," said Harry, "and see what can be done to help those who are worse off than we are. I may also be able to make some arrangements for ourselves as well," he said, turning to his mother, "although I am at present at a loss what to do, or which way to turn. I am entirely without a plan."

And so the three men started for Land View on their mission of mercy.

They found sympathizing friends at Land View, who at once contributed what was immediately necessary for the wants of the burned-out settlers, in the way of clothes and provisions; but the people being generally poor, they could not do much more. They

advised that the settlers, who had been burned out, if they could do so, should leave their claims until spring and return to their relatives, thus avoiding many hardships necessarily incident to living on the prairie in destitute circumstances in winter.

Richard Moneycounter called Harry into the back room of his bank, and after expressing much sympathy for their loss, told him that it was not customary, but under the circumstances he would be glad to advance him a few more hundred dollars on their claims. Harry thanked him heartily for his kind offer, and said he would consult his mother before accepting.

The relief party returned with quite a wagon-load of supplies for the sufferers, which Rev. John Landhunter undertook, with the help of Peter Bigman, to distribute, Harry getting off at Mrs. Snow's.

Harry told them of their kind reception and of the help given at Land View, and informed his mother, privately, of the offer which Richard Moneycounter had made.

"Do you think we had better accept it, mother?" he inquired.

"I dislike to borrow any more money from Mr. Moneycounter," she said, thoughtfully; "but I really do not see how we can avoid it."

"I don't like it either, mother, but it seems to me we have but little choice in the matter. What he offers to lend us will be enough to build us a little house

which we can all live in, and buy a cheap horse, which we cannot well do without on the prairie; there may be enough left by strict economy for us to live on until spring, then we will have 'to raise the wind' in some other way; perhaps we can sell some of our land to new settlers coming in in the spring."

"Your reasoning seems to be correct, my son; that seems to be the best we can do under the circumstances," said Mrs. Noble, rather sadly.

"I am afraid we shall have a rather hard winter, mother; I regret it mostly on your account, for the girls and I, being younger, can stand it so much better."

"Do not worry on my account, Harry, my boy; I shall do very well. I would be selfish, indeed, if I was not contented when you and the dear girls are doing all you can for me."

"O, there is something I wish to ask you, mother; did you save Grace's letter?"

"Yes; it is in the little valise which I saved."

"I have thought of it several times since the fire; I don't suppose it amounts to much; still she ought to have it when the time comes. When is her twenty-first birthday?"

"On the seventeenth day of next December; she will then control her own destiny."

On the next day Harry borrowed Peter Bigman's team to go to Land View. He went at once to Richard Moneycounter's bank and told him that they had

decided to accept his kind offer. He then hunted up a carpenter, and bought a load of lumber. In a few hours he was on his way back to Nobleton with a carpenter and the lumber, and before night the carpenter had begun work on their new house. It was to be not much larger than Mrs. Noble's former house, and to contain two rooms, and one very small room for Harry's bedroom. They made arrangements to divide up the family until their house was built, Grace Constant becoming Fanny Foundit's guest; Harry, Peter Bigman's; and Mrs. Noble and Minnie remaining with Mrs. Snow. Harry had supposed that no possible combination of circumstances could force him to become Peter Bigman's guest; but there seemed to be no other place for him. Peter Bigman was very urgent and persisted in his invitation, and really endeavored to make it as pleasant as possible for Harry, as well as offering his help in every way toward the rebuilding of Nobleton. In a few days the house was nearly finished, for the carpenter had obtained assistance. Harry drove to Land View with the ladies to purchase a few articles of furniture, and such necessary clothing as they could not dispense with. Grace Constant added her meager purse to the family fund, and insisted "that it should be used in common." They thought the outlay for furnishing their houses before had been very small; now they found they must make it much less. The prospect was not an exhilarating one, for the cold

winter would soon be upon them, when they would need all the comforts obtainable to meet its rigors. Yet none of them showed despondency; on the contrary, all tried to be as cheerful as possible, for the encouragement of the others; yet at heart there was a certain sense of disappointment in them all.

As soon as possible they moved into their new house, leaving the kind friends who had succored them with many warm expressions of gratitude.

"It seems very different from the old Nobleton," said Minnie, "and not nearly so nice."

"But there is an advantage, dear," said Mrs. Noble, cheerfully. "Here we shall be closer together; all under one roof. That is certainly an advantage."

"Yes, that is true," Minnie replied, remorsefully, at having let fall an expression of discontent.

The furniture was very plain and cheap, and there was only a strip or two of carpet here and there on the floor. Harry had built a little stable himself, and bought an old horse and wagon.

"If I could get some work to do in winter it would come in good now," he said; "but there is not a thing to do."

Their food was very plain. The beautiful Indian summer weather still continued, that had been an advantage and comfort to them in their troubles.

As soon as they were settled in their new house they had many callers, for their misfortunes had added to their popularity.

One day Richard Moneycounter rode up on horseback. They received him very cordially, for they now looked upon him as a tried friend of the family. He found his call so agreeable that it was nearly tea-time before he made a move to leave, when Mrs. Noble pressed him to stay to tea. He accepted the invitation at once. During the preparations Grace Constant started to the lake for a bucket of water. He requested permission to accompany her, which she smilingly granted. He took the bucket and they walked down the path to the lake, chatting pleasantly. Arrived at the lake they walked out on the little pier, and he, stooping, dipped the bucket full of water, then rising, placed it on the ground, and turned toward Grace Constant with a blushing, embarrassed-looking face. It was evidently an effort for him to speak, but he forced himself to do it.

"Miss Constant," he said, "I hope will pardon me for renewing my offer; but I do love and respect you, and if you would accept my heart and hand you would make me the happiest man on earth."

Grace Constant was completely taken by surprise; she looked at him when he first began to speak with amazement, and before he had finished dropped her face in blushing embarrassment. She stood a few moments thus, after he had finished, evidently in deep thought.

Her silence encouraged him. He spoke again more freely and boldly. "I wish to say also, Miss Constant,

that I greatly respect all the members of the Noble family, and greatly admire the fine, lady-like qualities of Mrs. Noble ; the poverty and privations which they must necessarily suffer on account of their loss by the fire has been a source of extreme regret to me. I have helped them all I could in a business way ; which, very properly, is the only way in which they would accept help from me. I have thought, permit me to say, that if you would accept me, that we might be of great service to them, and in ways that a proper personal pride would not prevent them from accepting. I have abundant means, and it would afford me real pleasure to be of assistance to your friends."

His kindness and magnanimity had reached Grace's heart. She still stood in deep thought. Here was an opportunity to be of real service to Mrs. Noble and her family, who had been so good to her ; to smoothe the rugged way for her foster mother, and relieve Harry and Minnie from a load of care. She did not love Richard Moneycounter ; but she respected and admired his fine qualities ; perhaps she could be happy with him ; at any rate, she would not be unhappy. Should she make the sacrifice ? There was another love tugging at her heart-strings, but as yet she was not bound by it ; she was still free. Might it not be best, even for Harry, if she sacrificed herself ? He was fondly devoted to his mother, and she could help him relieve her declining years of much hard-

ship. Perhaps it would be better ; yet she hesitated. It was hard to give up her girlish hope and love, the visions and bright imaginations of all her maiden hours. Yet, perhaps, she ought to do it. Still she hesitated, and Richard Moneycounter waited, rightly thinking that her hesitation augured hope for him. At last she raised her head, but did not look directly at him, but sideways, toward the lake, and said, in a low voice : " Please give me a week to think of your kind offer."

CHAPTER XV.

A week of suspense—Richard Moneycounter's offer—More losses and troubles—Mrs. Noble's illness—A talk by the way.

IT was a week of suspense to Richard Moneycounter, for he told the simple, honest truth when he told Grace Constant that he respected and loved her. Respect may be considered rather a discriminating word when used in connection with love. But he meant just what he had said. His was no blind love. In his quiet unassuming way he had carefully studied her character; had discovered the rich qualities of her mind and heart. It is possible he understood her better than any of the Noble family. People's characters are not always best understood by their nearest friends.

He knew that his father and mother would welcome such a bride, for they were people of sterling qualities, and would look below the superficial in so important a matter, which concerned the welfare and destiny of their favorite son; and he was sure that, once acquainted with Grace Constant, they would approve his choice. What a proud day it would be for him when he should be able to introduce this beautiful and dignified young lady to his friends as his wife. The more he thought and dreamed over

it the more he longed for a favorable answer to his suit.

Grace continued in the same wavering mind, trembling on the verge of a sacrifice, yet hesitating to make it; a most uncomfortable state of mind to be in. Many and many a time she conned the arguments for the sacrifice; her mind was willing, but her heart held back. Her cheek began to pale in the mental conflict, and there was an inattention to ordinary affairs observable in her, which was unusual. She had told Mrs. Noble of Richard Moneycounter's first offer; but his second she kept a profound secret, locked up in her own heart, for she knew that if Mrs. Noble knew the real state of affairs she would use all her influence to prevent the match; hence she knew, that if she accepted him, she must do so before the family could interfere. There was no disinterested friend in whom she could confide. She felt lonely in her struggle. Personal sacrifices of this kind must ever be lonely. To serve a friend to the fullest extent, it is necessary, sometimes, to shut him out of our innermost confidence.

Mrs. Noble and Minnie noticed a change in Grace Constant's looks and actions, and indeed they wondered what could be the reason for it; never guessing the real cause. They inquired, with solicitude, if her health was not good. She answered that she thought she was enjoying her usual health. Harry noticed the change, too, and with many little

attentions tried to win her back to her usual ways. All this kindness, especially from the one she loved, had a double effect upon her mind: first it made the meditated sacrifice harder; and, second, it made her more determined to make it, for she thought the sacrifice would be but a poor return for all their love and kindness to her.

Nearly at the end of the week of suspense Richard Moneycounter received the unwelcome news from his father that he had failed in business for a large amount of money, and that, on account of certain indorsements, his son would be involved in the failure, and both would lose all they had. This was a stunning blow to the young banker, and it took all his fortitude to bear it. Not only was it the loss of the money, which he deeply regretted, but he feared that it would be the loss of Grace Constant, also. He understood her well enough to know that if she married him it would not be from pure love, but also because he had promised to assist her friends. He loved her so much that he was willing to accept her hand on these terms, hoping, after marriage, to win her whole heart.

Many bitter hours he spent thinking the matter over, and trying to come to a decision as to what was his duty toward her. At last, with a fine sense of courage and manliness, on the day he was to have received his answer, he wrote the following letter, and sent it to her:

" Thursday morning.

" MISS GRACE CONSTANT :

" DEAR FRIEND: To-day is the one which I have looked forward to as the happiest one of my life. To-day I hoped to have heard the words from your lips which would have made you mine. Had such bliss been permitted to me, it would have been impossible for me to have expressed the joy I should have experienced ; but I regret to say that a dark shadow has been cast over my bright prospects. Since I have seen you I have heard the distressing news that my father has failed in business, involving me, also, in the failure, which is so great, that both he and I will lose all we have, and have a burden of debt resting upon us besides. You will see at once that I am utterly unable to provide for you as I hoped and expected to do, as well as unable to carry out my promise with regard to your friends. The feelings of my heart are unchanged toward you ; but since my circumstances have so greatly changed, I recognize the fact that, since you are still unbound to me by a promise, it would be an unfortunate thing for you to bind yourself to me with one now, even should you be willing to do so, which I have no right to assume.

" In order, therefore, that our relations to each other may again assume those of simple friendship, which, I hope, will not be unacceptable to you, I withdraw the offer of my hand to you. I hardly

need to say that I pen the above with a great sense of loss in my heart.

“Believe me truly your most sincere friend,

“RICHARD MONEYCOUNTER.”

When Grace Constant read this letter she heaved a great sigh—a sigh of relief and pity; relief that she was not required to come to a decision, and pity for the misfortune of so fine a young man. A load, however, was taken from her heart, and she speedily assumed her usual manner.

When Richard Moneycounter called again she condoled with him on his misfortune, and told him she would always be his sincere friend. He thanked her, suppressing his emotions with great effort.

Harry, Mrs. Noble, and Minnie were profuse in their expressions of regret over his loss. Mrs. Noble expressed the hope that, in this rapidly-growing country, with its many opportunities, that he would soon find a way to retrieve his loss. The whole family treated him with the greatest kindness, for which he felt a deep gratitude, remarking to a friend afterward: “There are a few people, after all, who will be kind to a man, instead of kicking him when he is down in the world.”

Mrs. Noble received a letter in a strange handwriting a few days after they were settled in their new house, and it was not without considerable curiosity she opened it and rapidly scanned its contents.

After reading it she handed it, with rather a pleasant smile, to Harry, who read it aloud for the benefit of the young ladies, as follows:

"YANKTON, *November, 1883.*

"MRS. NOBLE:

"MY DEAR MADAM: It is with sincere regret that I have just heard of you and your family being burned out recently by a prairie fire. I am heartily sorry for you all; for I know the discomforts of being burned out of house and home at this season of the year must be very great, not to speak of the pecuniary loss. You have my profound sympathy for yourself and family; and if I can be of any assistance to you, I hope you will feel perfectly free to call upon me. The Supreme Court of the Territory, of which all the circuit judges are members, is now in session here, otherwise I would like to have made my condolence in person.

"Believe me, my dear madam, your sincere friend,

"JOSHUA LAMBERTON."

"Good for the judge!" said Harry, after he had finished reading.

"Very kind, indeed," said Minnie. "I hardly imagined he thought enough of us to write and offer his services."

"He seems to be a very kind-hearted man, and then, you know, he is our neighbor," said Grace Constant.

Rev. John Landhunter had rebuilt his claim shanty. He was now devoting his time energetically toward building a new church at Land View. He called frequently at Mrs. Noble's house, and was one of the family's most earnest sympathizers. It seemed, however, to give him the greatest pleasure to express his sympathy to Minnie, and that young lady seemed to have pleasure in listening to him, and thought him one of the kindest-hearted and cleverest of men. He submitted all his church plans to her, and the ways and means of raising the money to build it. She, in her lively way, made a number of suggestions of great help to him. They were born of her intuitive good sense. One might wish that there were no more troubles for the Noble family to endure during the long winter about setting in. But human joys seem sometimes like a table of ten-pins—all set up in good order, and in their proper places—when an unseen hand rolls a ball of trouble at them, which knocks one down, then another, then another, until we look on in dread lest all should be swept away. In a few days after they had got settled in their new house the old horse which Harry had bought, hoping it would answer all necessary purposes for the winter, sickened and died. The family were, by this loss, entirely cut off from access to the outside world, except by walking, which was sometimes impracticable for the ladies. This was a great deprivation, indeed, for they always went to church at Land View, when

the weather permitted, and quite often drove to call on their neighbors, it being a relief from the monotony of living so secluded in a small house at a season of the year when there was not much out-of-door work to do. Then Mrs. Noble received a letter announcing the death of a dear friend in the East. Her health had rallied very much since they had come to Dakota, but the excitement of the fire and sense of loss afterward had told on her delicate constitution with a depressing effect, despite her fortitude. This last news—of the death of her friend—caused an unfavorable crisis, and a nervous fever set in. Harry and the young ladies were greatly alarmed, for sickness to them seemed enough to be dreaded for the mother when they could command the medical skill and comforts of civilization; but for her to be sick in this rude house, with many comforts unattainable, seemed hard indeed. Harry Noble went to Land View and engaged a doctor. He was a young and inexperienced student, just out of college. Though he was a fine young man, and they believed he would do all that he could for the sick one, yet they felt great unwillingness and hesitation in trusting that precious life in such unskilled hands. Mrs. Noble was a loving and patient sufferer. The doctor advised them to appear as cheerful as possible before her, and to try, as far as possible, to banish care and worry from her mind; so, though the hearts of the family were sad, they must wear smiling faces in her

presence, and present things to her in their most hopeful aspect. This was hard for them all to do, Harry in particular, for the burden of the family cares now rested entirely upon him. He could not but think of their straitened circumstances, the debt on the land, hardly enough money to carry them through the winter, and this small sum must be depleted by a heavy doctor's bill and for medicine for his mother. The cold winter months were upon them, their fuel low in quantity, and expensive to replace in this prairie country, where it is so scarce. Had this horse lived he might have hauled wood from the Missouri River bottoms, where it could be cheaply purchased; but now he could not do that.

The outlook was a dismal one, and his high spirits began to be depressed, but in his mother's presence he was wont to assume a cheerful look for her sake. The burden of responsibility rested heavily upon him, and he felt that a kind word from a sympathizing friend would be a great help to him. Who has not felt so in hours of darkness and trouble?

One day he walked with Grace Constant to Mrs. Snow's, leaving Minnie to take care of her mother. Mrs. Noble, with her kind-hearted thoughtfulness, even in her own sickness, remembered that they had not seen any of the Snows for several days, and sent Grace over to inquire if they were all well. Harry gladly embraced the opportunity to have a conversation with her.

"Grace," he said, "I have been wanting to talk with you about our family affairs for several days, but have not had a chance before. I want to consult with you; to see if you can help me by your advice to place them in better shape."

"You know, Harry," she replied, looking earnestly at him with her dark-blue eyes, "that any thing that I can do to help the family, either by advice or in any other way, I will most cheerfully do."

"I know that, Grace," he said, with beaming eyes; "so I have asked for your advice." He then told her all about the family affairs and the unfortunate position in which they were placed. He knew that she knew much that he told her, but it was a relief for him to tell her, and as she was a willing hearer, he thought that they might think over the family troubles together. She walked with her head down, pondering, for awhile, after he had finished speaking.

"Harry," she said, at last, looking at him with a reverent look in her eyes, "I have thought over what you have said; to me there seems to be no help which I can now give you in a human way, by advice or otherwise; but, Harry, there is another source of help which we must not neglect, we must 'trust in God.'"

"Yes, Grace, we must do that."

This agreement to trust in a higher, all-wise, and good God brought a sense of relief and help to their

hearts, and they continued their journey in a more cheerful state of mind, gradually relapsing into other topics. There was always a sense of completeness to them both when they were together in this way, and no cloud entirely obscured their happiness when in each other's society.

Arrived at Mrs. Snow's, they found the widow in about her usual state of worry, and overrun with work. The usual state of untidiness reigned in her house, perhaps a little more than usual, for one of her "Snow birdies" had been slightly ailing for a few days, and she was deterred from her house-work; that was the reason the Noble family had not seen any of the Snows for several days. The child was better now, and playing on the floor with the others. The children all gave Harry and Grace Constant a noisy welcome when they entered. Mrs. Snow inquired very pathetically for Mrs. Noble's health, hoping she would soon "be about again, but them fevers," she said, "are generally slow, tedious things; I'm going to run over and see her as soon as I can get Miss Foundit to stay with the children."

CHAPTER XVI.

Minnie's illness—Peter Bigman's opportunity—The proposal—A fortnight's delay—Mrs. Noble and Grace.

THE troubles of the family, apparently, did not at the beginning affect Minnie as much as the others. But the truth was that she felt them deeply. She had, however, determined, in her own mind, to try to maintain her naturally lively disposition in its full vigor, in order to keep the other members of the family from becoming despondent. She succeeded well for awhile in her kind purpose, but the mental strain was great—too great it seemed, for one morning she was unable to rise and complained of headache. She thought it would soon pass away; but when the doctor came to see Mrs. Noble and examined her, he told Harry and Grace that she had a high fever, with decidedly unfavorable symptoms.

"Poor Min," said Harry, "I'm afraid our troubles have been too much for her, yet she seemed to bear them better than any of us."

"That, I think, is probably the great cause of the sickness; there has been too much mental repression, and it has reacted upon her body. The natural expression of the feelings is the greatest safeguard to health," said the doctor.

"Minnie, I have no doubt, endeavored to maintain her usually lively ways to encourage the rest of the family," said Grace Constant.

"Doubtless her motives were good," the doctor replied, "but the laws of health are rigid, and we must pay the penalty of their violation, even when done with the best motives."

"That is one thing I cannot understand very well," said Harry; "why people must often suffer for doing good. One would naturally think they would be rewarded."

"I have thought of that, too," said Grace Constant. "To me at first it was very puzzling, but after thinking over it for a long time I came to the conclusion that good deeds are always rewarded. To the outside world this is not always apparent, but they cannot see the secret satisfaction of the soul after performing a good act. The doer may even find an added mental joy in the mental suffering, for the language of the heart is, 'Have I not done this good thing, even at the cost of suffering?'"

"I have no doubt there is generally such a mental reward as you speak of, but it is often marred by bodily suffering," said Harry.

"That is true as regards our present life, but when we have put off this body, the rewards for good deeds will be perfect," Grace Constant replied.

Grace Constant and Harry had now the nursing and care of their sick, and they felt that troubles were

settling down upon them like a dark cloud, but it was a labor of love, and they watched and cared for them assiduously day and night. But it was wearisome work, and the worst was that there was no visible improvement in the condition of their sick. Daily the doctor came and went, reporting no change for the better in the condition of his patients.

Days and nights of work and watching began to tell upon Grace Constant and Harry, but most upon Grace Constant, the weaker. She earnestly prayed to be able to bear the burden without faltering, but under the strain she began to grow nervous and depressed in spirit, although she concealed it as well as she could from the sufferers. She thought she would like to do so much more for them than her circumstances would permit; she longed to provide comforts, and even luxuries, for them which to her were now unattainable, and she thought that with better medical attendance their improvement might be greater. She studied and thought over in her mind how, if possible, these things might be obtained, but, study and think as she would, she could devise no means to get them.

“O, that I had plenty of money, that I might surround these sufferers, so dear to me, with all the comforts and luxuries of life, and place the best medical skill and science at their service! but it seems to me I can do nothing but watch and wait.”

How often our powers of execution lag behind the best wishes of our hearts.

Peter Bigman had watched the course of events in the Noble family with secret satisfaction, and gloated over them. They ministered greatly to his self-conceit. During the first few months the success of the Noble family had seemed unbounded, far surpassing his own in various ways, which, as we have before seen, was a great cause of chagrin to him. They had secured more and better land than he had, at less cost; for they had no relinquishments to purchase, whereas he had been obliged to increase his possessions by purchasing relinquishments. Then the popularity of the Noble family in the county, while he remained in comparative insignificance, injured his pride; and Harry's election to the Constitutional Convention, and success there, had been galling to his former superior officer. He had ground his teeth in secret, but to accomplish his dogged purpose—to secure the hand of Grace Constant—he had been obliged to look upon the success of the Nobles outwardly with complacency, and even to congratulate them. Hoping against hope, it seemed for a time that some unlucky turn of affairs might give him the longed for opportunity to push his suit.

In the mean time he had added to his land and to his cattle; had increased the size of his shanty, and was prospering. The adversity which he had wished to overtake the Nobles had come upon them. They had

lost their money ; had incurred a debt on their land ; had been burned out ; had lost their live stock, and, worst of all, Mrs. Noble and Minnie were both very sick. How quickly and strangely their relative positions had been reversed. He had prospered in every thing and had no reverses, while the Nobles, who seemed for a short time to have been tossed upon the crest of the wave of prosperity, were now down in the trough between the billows. He had, coldly, doggedly, persistently, waited for his opportunity, and now it seemed to him to have arrived.

After the Nobles had been burned out, as we know, he had offered his services to them. After the house had been rebuilt, and the horse had died, he had offered to drive the family to church every Sunday, and once they had accepted his offer ; but none of them felt comfortable in being under continual obligations to him. He visited frequently at the house, but since Grace Constant's melodeon had been destroyed by the fire, the only special means which he had of approaching her had been wanting. He was always kindly received and kindly treated by the family on account of the favors which they had accepted from him, but he felt that he had no real warm place in the family heart. When Mrs. Noble and Minnie were taken sick, he noted the depressing effects of days and nights of watching upon Grace and Harry ; he thought that another opportunity for him had come— long hoped and waited for—to

press his suit ; ignobly willing to take advantage of all the unfortuitous circumstances of her whom he loved.

One day, at this time, Peter Bigman drove over to Mrs. Noble's to inquire about the invalids. Harry told him, in the outer room, that there was no change for the better ; the doctor had left but a short time ago.

"He is going to change mother's medicine," Harry continued, "and wanted me to go to Land View and get the new medicine as soon as possible. I hope the change will help her, for nothing the doctor has given her has seemed to be of any benefit to her."

"I will drive over for the medicine, if you wish," said Peter Bigman.

"The medicine is not all we need. Grace says there are some other things we must have for the invalids ; she wants to buy them herself ; but I do not see how we can both leave at the same time, in fact we cannot, so Grace will have to go without me, and I will nurse mother and Minnie while she is gone."

"If Miss Constant would ride to Land View with me, I would be glad to have her," said Peter Bigman, inwardly aglow.

Harry called Grace out of the room and told her that Peter Bigman had kindly offered to drive to Land View for the medicine, and if she wished she

could accompany him, and make the purchases they needed.

Grace Constant hesitated a few moments, not caring to take the ride with Peter Bigman alone, but the case was urgent, and she might not soon have another opportunity, so she said: "I am obliged to you, Mr. Bigman, for your kind offer, and will get ready to start at once."

Harry helped her into the wagon at the door, and pleasantly bade them "Good-morning" as the wagon drove away. He little knew what a risk his own happiness was running of being wrecked on that short journey; or what a source of trial it would be to Grace Constant.

It was a pleasant morning; the sun shone brightly; the sky was clear and blue, the air cold and crisp.

Peter Bigman and Grace Constant rode to Land View quite pleasantly, talking first of the pleasant Dakota weather, then reverting back to scenes and times at their old home. As both avoided embarrassing subjects, the time passed quite agreeably and the ride to Land View seemed quite short.

Arrived at Land View, Grace Constant procured the medicine for Mrs. Noble, and made her purchases as quickly as possible, being in haste to return and relieve Harry, in nursing the invalids. As soon as they were well out of Land View Peter began to dilate upon his prospects and his success thus far in Dakota.

"I shall have a splendid stock farm," he said, "and

expect to add to *my* herd as rapidly as possible, for *I* think raising cattle and sheep the most profitable business in Dakota. Just look over this prairie and think of the millions of tons of splendid grasses going to waste every year for want of cattle to eat them. I propose to do my share toward furnishing mouths to eat them, and think I shall get a rich profit from it as well."

"I certainly hope you will," said Grace Constant.

"Then *I* expect to build me a nice house, and plant trees around it, and make a pleasant home."

"Your place is well located for a pleasant home," she said.

He was warily leading the conversation into a channel he wished it to enter.

"I am very sorry," he said, "that Harry Noble and his family have been so unfortunate. They have the best land about here; but, then, it is covered with debt."

"Yes," said Grace Constant, slowly, "we are deeply in debt, and we find it a great trial."

"And then to be burned out and lose every thing just at the beginning of winter was another hard stroke of fortune."

"Very," she replied; "but our friends were so kind to us that we have not suffered as much as I expected."

"You have had kind friends, doubtless; nevertheless the result is that the family are still deeper in debt."

"That is true," said Grace, her mind depressed by much watching, readily following him into a gloomy train of thought, and not detecting his purpose.

"Then to have all the trouble intensified and increased by Mrs. Noble and Minnie being taken down with a long spell of sickness, deprived of comforts and medical attendance which they ought to have, is hardest of all."

"You speak truly," said Grace Constant, despondently; "it has been a hard trial to me, and I have often wished to help them in ways in which I am unable."

"I have felt like helping them, too," he said, sympathetically, "but they will accept nothing from me of importance."

Grace Constant knew this was true, and remained silent.

Peter Bigman had led the conversation to what he believed to be the critical point, and now, nervously, but with a dogged determination, pressed the important question.

"But although they are reluctant to accept any thing from me, yet *I* would like to help them," in a magnanimous tone. "O, Miss Constant, if you would only let me help them through you!"

"How could I?" inquired Grace, innocently, but a little startled.

"Miss Constant, you have turned away from my suit twice before, but I love you still, and would do

any thing for you. If you will accept me you can do as you will with all I have. You could then help your friends, and they would accept it from your hands."

He spoke fervently, and with a passion that one would hardly have expected from his cold-blooded temperament.

Grace Constant looked at him with a surprised and startled look in her liquid blue eyes, the color which the clear, crisp air had brought to her cheeks fled, and under the white skin the sapphire veins could be plainly seen. She looked at him thus a moment, then looked down, and was silent. Thus she sat as they drove slowly over the yellow grass of the prairie; she seemed rigid. Peter Bigman looked at her and waited for an answer, but she gave no sign of life or motion. He began to move nervously in his seat, and to wonder if he could say any thing else to strengthen his suit; but he could think of no influence or argument which he had not used. He thought of testing her by some little endearment, but she was so still, quiet, and dignified-looking, that he feared to jeopardize his hopes by doing so. They were in sight of Mrs. Noble's house. In a few minutes they would be there. He became desperate, but still she sat motionless, looking down. At last he said, pleadingly,

"Miss Constant, wont you say 'Yes' to my petition?"

She did not answer him.

They drove up to the house. She quietly allowed him to help her out of the wagon, but did not look into his face. As she walked toward the house she turned and said, hurriedly, to him :

“Wait a moment.”

Directly she came out again, handed him a small piece of white paper, and hurried into the house again.

He quickly mounted his wagon and drove away. A short distance from the house he opened the paper, with nervous hands, to learn his fate. In faint, trembling lines these words were written : “In two weeks you may ask for my answer.”

Peter Bigman was angry ; his face became distorted by passion. He crumpled the innocent, little piece of white paper fiercely in his hand. He gave his horses a fierce cut with his whip, which sent them tearing homeward. “How dare this girl trifle with *me* ?” he thought. Having an exaggerated opinion of his own merits, he thought others should bow to his egotism. Was *he* not conferring a favor upon her by offering her *his* hand and *his* heart ? And instead of accepting the offer with alacrity, she trifled with him, asked him “to wait two weeks.” Why wait ? If she was anxious to accept him she would have done so at once. And why not anxious after the advantageous offers he had made to her ? How was it possible that she could not love *him* ? He who loved

her so well." In his anger he thought of withdrawing his offer, but his dogged determination to accomplish his purpose prevented him. "He would never give her up while there was a ray of hope. And was there any hope?" He opened the crumpled paper, reined up the horses until they came to a slow walk, then smoothed out the creases of the paper on the seat of the wagon, and read again :

"In two weeks you may ask for my answer."

"In two weeks." Yes, there was hope. She hesitated, was undecided ; before she gave positive denials, now she asked him to wait. Yes, there was hope, a ray of hope ; she had never given him even this before. He could afford to wait two weeks ; he would wait. He felt better ; there was hope, bright hope. After all, his long journey might be repaid by success. After all, by persistent following, and an acute taking advantage of circumstances, he might win her, and then all this indecision and trifling with him would be done away. *He would be her master.*

When he arrived at home he was in quite a cheerful frame of mind, and so continued for many days.

Grace Constant went about her duties in a pre-occupied state of mind. Although she did the housework skillfully, and waited upon and nursed the patients tenderly, such things as did not require her special attention were done mechanically. She was thinking, constantly and continually thinking, of what her duty was, and how she ought to do it. Every

little act of devotion, every little attention which she bestowed upon the dear sick ones, made a mute appeal to her heart, whether she was not doing all she could for them. She might have them so much better cared for and so much more comfortable at a personal sacrifice. And yet she was holding back. Why should she? She did not love Peter Bignan; perhaps never could love him; but would not her sacrifice be a greater test of her devotion to her friends? Noble natures sometimes seem to have a predisposition for self-sacrifice, perhaps under a distorted sense of duty. Such seemed to be Grace Constant's condition at this time, intensified by the depression of spirits consequent upon wearisome nursing and watching. Her friends all noticed a preoccupation and thoughtful stillness about her; but, knowing nothing of the real cause, attributed it to the unusual care and responsibility devolving upon her.

One day Grace Constant was sitting beside Mrs. Noble's bed, clasping her hand, when Mrs. Noble said :

"Grace dear, I am very sorry that you are obliged to have so much care and to work so hard for us."

"Why, auntie," she replied, "you know I am glad to be able to do any thing in the world for you."

"Yes, I know you are, dear," replied Mrs. Noble, in her weak voice; "yet it seems hard that you should be obliged to do so much for people who are no kin to you."

"But auntie, you have been a mother to me, and

any thing that I could do would be but a small return for your kindness to me."

Mrs. Noble little guessed how much more she meditated doing for them than she had done, and Grace dared not tell her.

"I have thought since I have been sick, Grace dear," said Mrs. Noble, "that it was hardly right to bring you out on this Dakota prairie with us, and subject you to all the hardships and deprivations of frontier life. I have thought your father might not have wished it, had he lived."

"But, auntie dear, how could you help it? Am I not one of the family? and do you think I would consent to be left behind? Then I know my father would consider himself fortunate to have me under your care wherever you might be. Please don't disturb yourself about these things any more, auntie; you know it is because you are sick that you take these despondent views of things; when you get better, you will look at it quite differently. I am so glad I came to Dakota with you, auntie. Why, how should I have felt to have you sick, and Minnie sick, and no one to nurse you, and I away off in Jersey City, or New York? It makes me shudder to think of it. No, auntie, let me assure you, that I am always thankful to be near you." She kissed Mrs. Noble.

"You are a dear, good girl, Grace, and a great comfort to me; and to us all," said Mrs. Noble, wiping away a tear.

"Don't praise me, auntie; what little I have done or may be able to do for you or the family, seems to me but a drop compared to your great kindness toward the poor orphan."

"Are you not feeling well?" asked Mrs. Noble, anxiously, changing the subject. "I have noticed a change in you during the last few days; I hope you are not sick."

"O, no, auntie; I am quite well, I assure you. I have more to do, as you know, and am very much occupied all the time; but I am not sick. Do not, auntie, please, get that idea into your mind to worry you."

"I hope for your own and our sakes that you will not get sick. I don't know what we should do if you did."

"Do not be in the least alarmed about me, auntie. I am quite well."

CHAPTER XVII.

Fanny Foundit's long visit—The blizzard—Harry sprains his ankle—Grace Constant's night meditation—She decides to accept Peter Bigman—A beautiful morning after a storm.

IT was nearly the middle of December, and still Mrs. Noble and Minnie were sick, with but little signs of improvement. The long watching had begun to tell heavily upon Grace Constant; not so much physically as mentally, for the conflict was still going on in her mind, whether she would accept or reject Peter Bigman's offer. Sometimes her womanhood arose in rebellion at the thought, but when she looked upon the sufferers, her heart sank within her.

One morning when Harry and she happened to be just outside the door, Harry, looking upon her with a great tenderness in his eyes and an unusual gentleness in his manner, said to her: "Grace, I am so sorry that you are having such a hard time nursing and working. I wish I could make it easier in some way for you."

"Why, Harry, I need no more help than you give me, and I am getting along very well," in a reproachful tone, "one would almost think I had been complaining."

"Ah, Grace, you would never complain; you would die in your tracks first."

"Now, Harry, don't abuse me."

"I wish I could get one of your own sex to assist you."

"But there is no one but Fanny Foundit, and she is so off-hand and loud in her manner that she annoys auntie; so I do not encourage her to come here much, although she has several times offered to come and do all she could."

"You are putting us all under a great debt of gratitude to you, Grace, by your devotion."

"Do not speak to me in that way, Harry," with a little flash of temper. "It makes me feel as if I was not one of the family."

"Forgive me, Grace," he said, looking long and tenderly into her dark-blue eyes. There was an instantaneous flash of recognition and answer to his love which he could not fail to see. Then she turned away and entered the house, leaving Harry in a delicious dream.

Peter Bigman came daily to inquire for the sick ones, and made daily offers of assistance of any kind which he could render. But there was nothing in particular that he could do, unless something was wanted at Land View; then he drove there, either alone, or accompanied by Harry. Grace took great care that she should not be thrown alone into his company before the two weeks had expired, and he was

prudent enough not to press his suit during that time. It was well for him that Harry did not know of the position of affairs between him and Grace Constant, or doubtless he would have lost control of himself and put the ban upon Peter Bigman's presence in their house. But he was innocent of the whole transaction, and, not knowing Peter Bigman's hidden motives and doings, really began to think that he had improved since he had moved to Dakota, and was a much better and truer man than he had been in New York.

"Harry, why are you piling so much wood up close to the door?" Grace Constant inquired of him one morning, as she stood a moment watching him busily at work.

"It is the fiftecnth day of December, Grace, and if the stories I hear of the winters and storms in Dakota are true, I think it a good plan to have plenty of wood right handy, or we may not be able to get it when we want it."

"O, I hope we will not have any of those terrible blizzards we have heard about. It don't seem possible to-day. It is a clear, beautiful day; pretty cold, it is true, but crisp and bracing weather."

"I hope we sha'n't have a blizzard; but it is best to be ready," Harry replied.

"I really believe that is Fanny Foundit coming over there, what in the world shall I do with her? she almost drives anntie wild with her loudness," said Grace.

"She means well," said Harry, "but she had better stay away, for she does more harm than good."

"That is true; but how can we prevent it?"

"Why, how do you do, Miss Constant? How are you, Harry?" shaking hands with both. "I hope mother and Minnie are better; not much? too bad! what a long spell they are having. Must be tired to death nursing; thought I would run over and help you a spell. Would come oftener, but I go over to Mr. Bigman's often and tidy up his place, and do a little cooking for him. You see he has always been used to having his mother look after him, and keep his household affairs straight; now he has no one, so I take quite an interest in the poor fellow, and run over and help him a little sometimes. Right, aint it?" turning to Harry.

"O, yes, certainly," said Harry, smiling. "Very kind in you to look after an old bachelor; saves him the trouble of sewing on his buttons, mending his stockings, and the like. You are a good Samaritan, Miss Foundit."

"Now, Harry, quit laughing at me; you know very well that you would like some woman to be a sister to you if you were living in a claim shanty; but let us go in and see the invalids, and if you have any work you want a helpin' hand in, Miss Constant, just show it to me."

Grace Constant reluctantly opened the door and showed her in. Fanny Foundit took off her hat and

shawl, hung them upon hooks in the outer room, and walked into the room where Mrs. Noble and Minnie were lying in separate beds.

"Sorry you are no better, Mrs. Noble," she said, seating herself by the bedside. "Hoped you'd been about before this time, but these fevers hold on for a long time sometimes."

She was a Job's comforter. Poor Mrs. Noble winced and almost trembled under her rude address.

"I hope I shall be spared to be about again soon," she said, faintly.

"Yes, I hope so, too, even if it does take a long time."

"And how are you to-day, Minnie?" she said, going over and seating herself beside Minnie's bedside.

"About the same, I think," said poor Minnie, feebly, shrinking away from her.

"Well, you are young and strong, and you ought to be around soon; perhaps if you would perk up a little you would get around sooner. Sometimes people get hipped and think they are sicker than they are."

"I wish that was the case with me," said poor Minnie to her torturer, "but I am sure it is not."

"Then you ought to take your medicine regular, and mind the doctor's order."

"I do as well as I can, but some of the medicines do not agree with me; I can't help that, can I?"

"Miss Foundit, please come out here, and help

me," said Grace, coming to the door, much distressed at the discomfort which Miss Foundit's rough ways caused the invalids.

Grace Constant contrived to keep Fanny Foundit employed until dinner-time, keeping her out of the sick-room as much as possible. The day still continued bright and clear, but after dinner Mrs. Noble and Minnie both complained of feeling cold, and getting colder all the time. Grace put more bed covering on them, and Harry put more wood into the stoves. Fanny Foundit said, directly: "Why, how cold I am. It seems to me as if my fingers turn into ice when I get away from the stove."

Grace said she felt very cold, too. "I can't understand it; it's such a bright clear day; we have good fires in the stoves, yet we are all complaining of the cold."

For Harry, too, was saying: "It's awful chilly."

Soon the wind began to rise, blowing harder and harder, and clouds began to cover the bright, blue sky. Then the snow began to fall thickly and rapidly, filling the air with particles as fine as flour; so densely filling it that a person could not see distinctly more than two or three feet in front of them. Looking out of the window, all signs and landmarks were obliterated. The ground was a white sheet; the air a whirling cloud of powdered snow. The wind shrieked and blew terribly around the little house, as if enraged with it as an obstacle in its path, which, like a mighty

giant, it would tear into atoms, and drive fiercely before it, among the fine, white particles of snow. It grew intensely cold. They pushed the beds of the invalids nearer the stove, and Harry filled both stoves with wood; he and Grace Constant and Fanny Foundit were obliged to wrap themselves up in much extra clothing, and spent the greater part of the time huddled around the stove in the outer room.

"This must be a blizzard," said Grace Constant.

"Should think it was, or any thing bad you have a mind to call it," said Fanny Foundit, leaning forward in her chair and spreading her cold fingers over the stove.

"How suddenly it came," said Harry; "that's the most surprising thing about it."

"I am glad I was not on the prairie when it did come up," said Fanny Foundit; "I might have been on my way here, you know."

"Yes, or to Peter Bigman's," said Harry, with a smile.

"But what a dreadful thing to be caught on the prairie with a team," said Grace; "this storm is bewildering, a person could not see which way to drive or turn."

"Yes, it is a dreadful fix to be caught in," said Harry; "there are no fences in this country, and very few landmarks of any kind; nothing can be seen but a white, whirling waste; one caught in such

a blizzard would drive around in a circle, utterly bewildered.

"Until they give up and freeze to death," said Fanny Foundit.

"I hope no poor soul is caught in this one," said Grace Constant.

Toward night the storm increased; the wind blew a perfect gale; the air was, if possible, more completely filled than ever with snow; the cold grew more intense. The little house creaked and trembled before the blast; the piercing cold wind blew in under the door, around the windows, and in every little crevice; it even found its way up through the floor. That night the thermometer marked forty below zero.

"You ladies had better all go to bed," said Harry to Grace Constant, "and I will stay up and keep the fires going in this room, and in mother's room. We cannot get along without good fires to-night."

The blizzard continued through the long, terrible night. Mrs. Noble and Minnie could not sleep, on account of their increased nervousness because of the storm. They required much attention, and Grace Constant was up the greater part of the night; but Fanny Foundit, who had been relegated to Harry's room, slept soundly, loaded down with bed clothing.

It was a long dreadful night, a night of suffering to the people, awake, in that little house on the prairie; and it is not to be wondered at if both the

sick and their watchers wished themselves safely back in their warm and comfortable home in Jersey City, where there were no dreadful blizzards. The long-wished-for morning came at last, but brought with it little relief; it was not so dark, that was all. The blizzard still raged in all its fury, and it seemed as if it would never cease. Harry went out and brought in a supply of wood. It was the breath of an arctic hurricane that came in at the hastily opened and closed door. It was well that he had piled the wood close to the door, or probably he would have perished in reaching it. Miss Foundit slept late and came out, shivering, to the fire.

"Land sakes! Is this blizzard never going to stop blowin'?" she said, looking out of the window in dismay.

"It has been a dreadful night," said Harry, "and mother and Minnie are frightened almost to death. It did not seem to disturb your sleep much, though?"

"O, I slept pretty good, dreamed a good deal, though; dreamed that this house was on one of the peaks of the Rocky Mountains, and a big giant was teetering it back and forward. I expect it was the wind shaking the house that made me dream the ugly dream."

"This house shakes a good deal, but it stands the blizzard better than one would possibly think," said Harry.

"I wonder how my poor little claim shanty is getting along; I hope it is not scattered all over the prairie. It has all my things in it," said Fanny Foundit, ruefully.

"Harry dear," said Mrs. Noble, in a plaintive, feeble voice; when he went into her room, "I have thought a great deal of poor Mrs. Snow and her children since this storm began; I am afraid they will perish."

"They will have a hard time, I have no doubt, mother, but I hope they will come through all right. I put a good pile of wood by Mrs. Snow's door for her when I was over last, and told her she must prepare for a blizzard, which was likely to come at any time at this season of the year."

"Would it not be possible for you to go and help them, Harry?"

"Impossible. Mother, I do not know when I should return, if ever; besides, I cannot leave you and Minnie on sick-beds, without a male protector."

"May the good Lord preserve Mrs. Snow and her children, and all others exposed to this dreadful blizzard!" said Mrs. Noble, clasping her hands and lifting her eyes reverently upward.

The effect of the blizzard upon Mrs. Noble and Minnie had a very depressing effect upon Grace Constant. She began to upbraid herself, inwardly. If she had not delayed in accepting Peter Bigman's offer, might not her dear friends have been relieved

from the discomforts of this blizzard, and have escaped a trial, which, in their condition, might be serious? Was she giving up every thing for the sake of her foster-mother, as she had thought she was willing to do? If this sacrifice was demanded of her, why had she not yielded at once, and accomplished a greater good than she can now hope to do, even if she yielded? Yet, strange to say, she still held back from making the sacrifice, or rather she delayed in making it, in her mind, until the last moment. She felt that she could not give up Harry until the last moment of her probation had expired.

The blizzard continued throughout the day. Occasionally there would be rifts in the bewildering hurricane of powdered snow, so that the range of vision would be increased for a short time; then it would become one mass of blinding snow again. The wind blew as fiercely as ever, and the intense cold continued.

Fanny Foundit was a prisoner. This loud, noisy, officious woman, whose presence had so ill an effect upon the sick ones, and whose presence Grace Constant dreaded in the house, even for an hour or two, on their account, seemed to be unaccountably and unreasonably thrust upon them, all through this dreadful blizzard; a time, it seemed to her, that required all the patience and self-restraint at their command to satisfy the trying demands of the time without her disturbing presence. But she was there, and the trial

must be borne with the others. She nerved herself as best she could.

Toward night Harry went out to bring in a supply of wood for the night, Grace opening and shutting the door for him. He brought in great armfuls, in his big, strong arms, and as he bore the weight so easily she could but admire his fine muscular strength, "so different," she thought, "from what he was when working at the desk in the railroad company's office in New York."

But as he brought in the last load he slipped and fell on the snowy threshold; the wood flew out of his arms as he struck the floor; the door flew wide open, and the piercing wind penetrated every part of the little house. Minnie screamed, Mrs. Noble sat up in bed, Fanny Foundit hurried to help Harry pick up the wood, so that they might shut out the cold wind.

"How awkward in me!" exclaimed Harry.

He made a movement to rise quickly, but felt a sharp pain in his ankle, which made his face turn white. Grace Constant noticed his ineffectual effort to rise, and change of color, and leaning over him, exclaimed:

"Why, Harry, what's the matter?"

"O, nothing," he replied, "only a pain in my ankle."

He tried again to rise, but could not. Then Grace Constant and Fanny Foundit assisted him into the

house and shut the door. Grace Constant, looking very much frightened herself, went in to quiet Mrs. Noble and Minnie.

"What is the matter, dear?" inquired Mrs. Noble, anxiously, her excitement, to some extent, overcoming her weakness.

"Nothing serious, auntie," she replied, as quietly as she could. "Harry fell coming in the door-way with a load of wood, and I fear he has sprained his ankle badly."

"Poor boy!" she exclaimed; "take off his shoes and stockings at once, and apply the remedy I shall tell you; I hope he will soon be better." She told Grace the remedy. Grace went out to apply it. She found that Fanny Foundit had already relieved him of his shoe and stocking. After applying the remedy Harry seemed more comfortable, but still suffered a great deal of pain. Grace Constant decided that he must sleep in his own room that night; that it would be cruel and injurious for him to sit up all night. Harry remonstrated, but she insisted, and finally he yielded.

Grace Constant and Fanny Foundit were obliged to assist him into his room, and he suffered greatly during the short walk.

"Bad sprain is worse than a broken leg," was Fanny Foundit's comforting remark when they got him into his room. "I shouldn't wonder if he was laid up for some time," she said, consolingly, to

Grace Constant, after they had returned to the outer room.

The blizzard howled and shrieked without the little house on the prairie, and sickness and pain reigned within. When Grace Constant was not attending Mrs. Noble and Minnie, she was obliged to sit with Fanny Foundit in the outer room. Miss Foundit had launched out upon the subject of sprains and bruises and their best remedies, with numberless instances of marvelous cures—a topic which Grace did not find very inspiring. In the beginning of the evening Miss Foundit had declared her intention to sit up with Grace and nurse the sick and tend the fires all night; but in the forepart of the night she began to gape and yawn between the instances of wonderful cures, and Grace, glad to be relieved of her company, suggested that she lie down beside Minnie and take a short nap. She protested that she was not sleepy, but finally consented to do so “for just a few minutes.” She did lie down and slept soundly until next morning.

Mrs. Noble and Minnie required some little attentions after Fanny Foundit had laid down; and then, worn out with weakness, anxiety, and trouble, had fallen asleep. Harry, too, was asleep, as his strong breathing plainly attested. Blessed sleep! it comes to the troubled and wearied ones of earth, in sorrow, trouble, and pain, and brings sweet respite. All but one in this afflicted household slept. Grace Constant

alone kept vigil, while the terrible blizzard raged without. When she was not replenishing the fires she sat by the stove in the outer room, and fought a battle with herself. All the arguments which she had gone over, in her mind, for accepting Peter Bigman before, were re-enforced by the new trouble in this afflicted household—the accident to Harry. The family protector was disabled, for a time at least, and all hope, or shadow of hope, of obtaining necessary comforts and medical advice for Mrs. Noble and Minnie, was impossible, except by her sacrifice; and now Harry needed help as well as his mother and sister, and she could help him as well as them. How he would scorn such help, she proudly thought, and Mrs. Noble and Minnie as well, if they knew by what a sacrifice she had obtained it. But they should never know; she would conceal from their loving eyes the real state of her feelings. They might consider her mercenary, if they would, for marrying Peter Bigman. They might think that she did so to escape the poverty of their home. If they did, so much the better; they would never know how much of her heart she sacrificed for their good. The more she thought over it now, the more she was determined to make the sacrifice. She made up her mind that she would not do it with cloudy discontent upon her brow, either; she would, to the world at least, be a cheerful bride. Bride! Peter Bigman's bride! She shuddered; yet he had good qualities; he was

good to his parents; he had done the family many kind acts since they came to Dakota. Had he not shown his magnanimity by placing all his possessions at her disposal, wherewith to help her friends, if she became his wife? Then he said he loved her; she could not doubt that he did, he was so earnest and persistent in his suit. He would, in his way, try to make her happy, and she would try and fall in with his views; at any rate, not fiercely combat them; his love for her would be a softening element. Yes; she might live with him comfortably and not unhappily. Yes; she would accept his offer. To-morrow was her twenty-first birthday, the seventeenth day of December, and she became her own mistress; she could then choose whom she would and none could hinder. She would celebrate it by making this sacrifice. She looked at the little clock. Why! it was five minutes past twelve o'clock! She was her own mistress now! Her mind was made up; she would accept Peter Bigman. Wait a moment, she thought, comparing dates in her mind. "The two weeks I took to consider will end on the eighteenth—to-morrow. I will be a free woman for one day—my birthday—then, to-morrow, I will accept Peter Bigman."

The long hours of the night passed slowly away, and none of the sleepers awoke. This was remarkable on the part of Mrs. Noble and Minnie, as they generally awoke many times in the night; so Grace

had long hours of meditation, disturbed only by the necessity of giving the required attention to the fires. She went over the arguments again and again in her mind, but she always arrived at the same conclusion, that it was her duty to accept Peter Bigman, and she would do it.

Little did the sleepers dream that there was a fiercer storm raging in the breast of that dignified and beautiful woman than was raging among the elements out on the prairie. When the night had nearly passed, Grace went softly to Mrs. Noble's bedside to look at her, wondering still at her long sleep. Mrs. Noble was sleeping peacefully as an infant. She stooped over her and kissed her, as softly as with lips of down. To herself she said: "Dear auntie, you have been very good to your ward. She gives you a kiss of love on her twenty-first birthday, and has promised herself to try and make a poor return for all your kindness." Then she went to Minnie's side. "Dear Minnie—sister, the only sister I ever had—so sick. I am going to try and help you, too, dear Minnie." She kissed Minnie, who stirred a little, but did not awake.

Grace Constant returned to the outer room. For the first time it occurred to her that the wind did not whistle and shriek as loudly as it had done, and the stoves seemed to throw out more heat. Had the terrible blizzard exhausted its strength? Soon the daylight began to appear. Grace looked out of the

window and noticed that the air was not so densely filled with snow, and she could see a greater distance out upon the prairie.

Knowing that the sleepers would soon be awake now, she began making preparations for breakfast, and it was not long before the rich aroma of coffee began to pervade the little house. In a short time Fanny Foundit came out of the bedroom rubbing her eyes, and exclaiming:

"Bless me, if it isn't morning! Grace, why didn't you wake me, and let me take turns with you watching?"

"O, it was not necessary, I got along very nicely; the sick did not require much attention," Grace replied.

"Why, land sakes, if the blizzard aint most over!" she exclaimed, going to the window. "I can see a long way, and there is a streak of light over there in the east; shouldn't wonder if the sun would be out after awhile; the wind's most gone down, too."

Grace soon had breakfast ready, and invited Fanny Foundit to sit down and partake with her, the remaining members of the family being still asleep. Harry awoke when they had finished, and Grace went in to inquire how he felt.

"I feel good enough," he replied, "excepting my ankle; I find I cannot use it very well."

Grace advised him not to arise until the doctor came, and insisted on taking his breakfast in to him.

As she was returning to the outer room a bright streak of sunshine shone in the little window, and made a pathway of light on the floor. A feeling of great relief passed over her at the sight of this bright token of the cessation of the storm.

Mrs. Noble and Minnie still slept very quietly. The sun soon shone out in his splendor; the sky was a beautiful blue, the air crisp, the wind gentle; it was a pleasant winter morning. There was not much snow on the ground, and only occasionally small drifts. Evidently the snow-fall had not been great, but its hardness and powdery fineness, driven by the wind, had kept it flying in the air.

"Well, I'm mighty glad the blizzard's over," said Fanny Foundit, "and, if you can spare me, I will go over and see if there's any thing left of my shanty."

"I think I can get along," Grace replied. "Thank you for coming over."

"No thanks necessary; I'm glad I was in your house during that dreadful blizzard, and not alone in my shanty."

Grace felt greatly relieved by the cessation of the blizzard, and by the departure of Fanny Foundit.

Mrs. Noble began to move in her bed and Grace went in to see her.

"Good-morning, auntie. How do you feel this morning?"

"I have had a delightful sleep and feel greatly rested."

"I am glad to hear it, auntie. Do you know the blizzard is over and it is a beautiful day?"

"I am very thankful. It was a dreadful storm. I hope all have passed through it as safely as we have. How is Harry's ankle?"

"He is not able to get up yet."

"And how is Minnie?"

"She has had a good night's sleep, like yourself, auntie, and is still sleeping. I hope she will feel better when she awakes."

"Poor girl! I am sorry she is sick; it seems so hard for her who has never been used to any thing of the kind."

"Please do not talk so much, or you will tire yourself, auntie, and let me get you ready for your breakfast; I have a nice little breakfast ready for you."

"You are a dear good girl, Grace. I do not see how I could love you more if you were my own daughter. But where is Fanny Foundit?"

"Gone home to see if her shanty and her worldly goods are still safe; she was much concerned for their safety."

With gentle and loving hands Grace Constant performed the duties of a nurse, and was rewarded by seeing Mrs. Noble look more refreshed and comfortable.

Then she brought in her breakfast, which was a simple one, indeed, for the doctor ordered the plainest diet ; but it well accorded with Mrs. Noble's enfeebled appetite. Grace sat by the bedside while she ate, or rather attempted to eat, to please Grace, who ministered to her smallest want with such a wistful earnestness in her beautiful, dark-blue eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mrs. Noble gives Grace Constant her father's letter on her twenty-first birthday—Peter Bigman's unexpected journey to Plankinton.

AFTER Mrs. Noble had finished her invalid meal she turned to Grace, and said: "Please take the things away and return to me." After Grace had done so she inquired of her: "Is Minnie still asleep? Poor child!"

"Yes, auntie dear, Minnie is still asleep."

"Then prop me up in bed as well as you can with pillows; bring the small valise I saved from the fire, and come and sit beside me."

"Yes, auntie," said Grace, complying cheerfully, "but remember you are very weak and sick. I hope you are not going to do any thing that will make your fever worse." She wondered greatly what the preparations portended.

"I am glad that my good sleep has given me strength for the duty which I am now about to perform. Grace, do you know what day this is?"

"Yes, auntie; the seventeenth day of December, and my twenty-first birthday."

"You are right; lean toward me, dear, and let me kiss you and congratulate you. I am sorry I cannot do it under pleasanter surroundings for you."

"Dear auntie, do not condemn yourself by implication in that way. You have done the best you could for me, and I am so glad to be permitted to be with you."

"You have always been a dear good child," said Mrs. Noble, tenderly; "ever since I took you, an orphan, nine years old, twelve years ago, you have been a great comfort to me, and very dear to us all."

"You have all been so good to me, auntie, and given me such a real home, I love you all dearly."

"From to-day, you know, dear Grace, my guardianship expires, and henceforth you are your own mistress entirely."

"Would that all poor orphans were so fortunate as to have such kind, good guardians as I have had in Mr. Noble while he lived, and in you, auntie, after he died."

"We have only tried to do our duty to you, Grace."

"Yes, auntie, but O, so tenderly and with loving kindness!"

"I have but one more act to perform, by your father's request, and my office as your guardian is accomplished."

"I do not know what you refer to, auntie, but I feel that my gratitude and love has never made, nor can make, a fitting return for your kindness to me; but I will do what I can to serve you."

Mrs. Noble little knew the contemplated sacrifice

which these simple words of devotion of Grace Constant concealed.

"Please hand me a glass of water," said Mrs. Noble.

Grace quickly handed it to her, saying: "Dear auntie, I hope you will not overtax your strength. Had you not better finish this interview some other time when you are stronger?"

"No, Grace, I must do it now. When your father requested my dear, departed husband and myself to take charge of you, after his death, he left a letter, which we, or the survivor, was to hand to you on your twenty-first birthday. He requested us to preserve its existence a secret from you until this time, unless you wished to marry; then we were to inform you of its existence, and to tell you it was your father's dying request that you should not marry until you had read it on your twenty-first birthday. Obedience to his request would have necessarily delayed your marriage until your twenty-first birthday. As you never became engaged, nor were likely to marry, I have not informed you of my having possession of this letter. Now I will give it to you. Please put the valise on the bed and open it."

Grace opened the valise in front of her. Mrs. Noble, with her white and feeble hands, removed several articles, and then took out a neatly-tied parcel; she untied it, removed several paper wrappings, Grace watching her intently, and finally uncovered a

small, white letter, now yellow with age, sealed with red sealing-wax, and handed it to Grace.

Grace received it reverently, and with much apparent emotion. It was a message from her long since dead parent. "My father's writing," she said, pressing it to her lips.

"I have no doubt, dear Grace, but you would like to read your father's letter alone; you may, if you wish, retire to the other room."

"Thank you, auntie; but you must be tired of sitting up so long and talking so much. Let me make you comfortable."

Mrs. Noble did look very tired. Grace removed the valise from the bed, adjusted the pillows, and Mrs. Noble laid down again. Then Grace went into the outer room to read her father's message. She sat by the window a few minutes, her mind taking a retrospective view of the past, and then, after tenderly kissing her father's letter again, she broke the red seal.

She took from the envelope a small sheet of note paper, opened it, glanced at its contents. There were only a few lines and she read them in a moment, as follows:

"NEW YORK, Oct. 20, 1871.

"TO GRACE CONSTANT:

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER: This letter will be handed you on your twenty-first birthday, the seventeenth day of December, 1883, wherever you may be. When you

receive it, you will please forward your address by the quickest method to Messrs. Quibble & Twist, attorneys, 100 Broadway, N. Y.

"They have an important communication which they will at once make to you.

"Your loving father, NATHAN CONSTANT."

Grace Constant gazed at the few lines for a few moments in amazement. She had expected a kind and tender letter, conveying the last wishes of her deceased parent to his daughter on her twenty-first birthday, with, perhaps, some advice and directions for her future welfare. What she held in her hands was simply a formal business letter, excepting that he closed it by calling himself her "loving father." Then it occurred to her that her father had arranged matters so that she could not marry until she was twenty-one years old without disobeying his dying request. What could it all mean? She could not understand it at all! After pondering over the letter a short time, she arose, and went with it to Mrs. Noble, with a perplexed look upon her face. Mrs. Noble noticed her expression and wondered.

"Dear auntie," said Grace, "I wish to read my father's letter to you; I cannot understand it at all."

"Certainly, dear, I will assist you if in my power."

Grace read the short letter to her.

Mrs. Noble looked much surprised, and, after thinking a minute, said: "Really I do not know what to

think of the letter. I do not know Messrs. Quibble & Twist, and I am at a loss to know what communication they have to make to you. I am quite as much surprised as you are. Harry knows of the existence of the letter, and knows you were to receive it to-day. Please go and ask his opinion about it."

In compliance with Mrs. Noble's request, Grace at once went into Harry's room. She told him about his mother giving her the letter.

"And so you have received your birthday letter from mother?" he said. "I am glad. It must be a relief to mother, for the safety of it was always on her mind; once she thought she had lost it, and I was afraid it had been burned in the prairie fire, but mother saved it in her valise."

"I am sorry auntie has had so much trouble with it; and, Harry, now that I have received it, I am sorely perplexed to understand it. Auntie cannot understand it either, and told me to bring it to you and ask you what you thought of it. Please read it," handing him the letter.

Harry quickly glanced over the letter, and then looked into her face with a surprised look, and said:

"Well, there is not much of it any way, and I am sure I don't know what it means; but one thing is very clear to me, and that is, that we must send to Plankinton and telegraph your address to Messrs. Quibble & Twist at once. Your father's request is explicit enough on that point. What the communi-

cation is which you will receive from the attorneys is a complete mystery to me. It can't be money matters, for I have always understood that your father left you his small fortune in an annuity. I really do not see what the communication can be, unless it is some family secret."

"How am I going to send to Plankinton to telegraph, Harry?"

"That's what's puzzling me now. How unfortunate that I sprained my ankle yesterday!"

At that moment there was a sound of a wagon driving up to the house. Grace looked out of the window, and exclaimed:

"Why! it is Peter Bigman."

"Come to see if the blizzard hasn't blowed us all away, I guess," said Harry.

"I think it very kind in him to come and inquire so soon," said Grace.

"Grace, there's your chance to send to Plankinton; ask Peter Bigman to go."

"I expect I must," said Grace, leaving the room and going out to receive Peter Bigman.

Peter Bigman expressed great delight to find the house all safe, and inquired anxiously for its inmates.

"Auntie slept better than usual last night, and Minnie also; she has just waked up. Unfortunately, however, Harry sprained his ankle yesterday, and it is so painful that he has not yet been able to leave his room."

"I am very sorry to hear of Harry's accident. I hope he will not be confined to his room long ; and, in the meantime, if I can take his place in any way I shall be happy to do so."

"Thank you. I may be obliged to accept your offer ; but first I wish to inquire whether you have heard or seen any thing of poor Mrs. Snow since the blizzard ?"

"O, yes ; I came that way and stopped to see how she had passed through the terrible storm. The poor woman was glad to see me. She said that she and her Snow birdies were awfully frightened, and she believed they would have frozen to death if Harry had not piled wood up by the door where she could easily get it."

"Had she gotten over her fright ?" Grace inquired.

"She seemed about as usual, I thought, and the Snow birdies quite as lively as usual. Jenny was making a blizzard pie with snow, and Jack showed me how thick the snow flew by dredging some flour on her head."

"I am greatly pleased they have passed so safely through it ; and now, Mr. Bigman, I am going to remember your promise, and accept of your services ; but I am sorry to say it will put you to a great deal of trouble, and take some time."

"Please consider my time and convenience entirely at your service, Miss Constant ; I will do any thing I can for you, no matter how long it takes."

Grace told him that she had just received a letter on her birthday, left by her father, and that it required her to send a telegram to New York; this must be done from Plankinton, and the person sending it must await an answer. "If you go to-day you will probably be obliged to remain overnight and return to-morrow."

"I will go back to my shanty and make arrangements to start at once. I shall not be back until to-morrow, surely, for to-morrow is an eventful day to me, *you know*;" he looked inquiringly in her face.

"Yes, I know," she replied, her head drooping, and a bright blush overspreading her face and neck.

Peter Bigman looked upon these signs as favorable to his suit, and a pleased look passed over his countenance.

"I will start at once, as soon as you give me the telegram."

Grace sat down by the table, wrote the following telegram, and handed it to him:

"December 17, 1883.

"MESSRS. QUIBBLE & TWIST, Attorneys, 100 Broadway, N. Y.: Please address me at Plankinton, Dakota.

GRACE CONSTANT."

He immediately left the house and drove rapidly away. After Peter Bigman had departed Grace Constant ministered to Minnie's wants; she had

hoped that Minnie would awake refreshed and with improved health, but such was not the case; she seemed to be in a drowsy, dull condition, which troubled Grace. During the morning the doctor came, with an anxious look on his face, and examined each of his patients. After doing so Grace followed him into the outer room and inquired as to their condition. The young doctor apologized for his absence, because of the blizzard, and said he was sorry to be obliged to tell her so, but he did not find any of his patients in a satisfactory condition. It seemed to him that Mrs. Noble was in a very exhausted condition, as if passing through some strong mental excitement; he did not like the drowsy state in which Miss Noble had awoke; and Harry's sprain seemed to be a bad one, although his foot and ankle were so badly swollen that he could scarcely tell yet as to his prospects.

"I am sorry you find your patients all in such unfortunate conditions, doctor."

"I regret it also, Miss Constant, on your account, as well as theirs, for you look tired and almost worn out with watching and nursing."

"I was up all night, doctor. I expect that gives me a tired look; if I can get a little sleep to-day I hope I shall feel better."

After the doctor had departed, Grace Constant's heart sank within her as she thought of the doctor's words about his patients. Shortly after the doctor

had left, Rev. John Landhunter called. He was thankful to find that they had passed safely through the blizzard, and inquired anxiously for Mrs. Noble and Minnie.

Grace told him, with a sad face and in subdued tones, that the doctor had been there and given her rather an unfavorable opinion of their condition.

Mr. Landhunter looked very sympathetic and much concerned. Grace then told him of Harry's accident.

"Truly this house is full of trouble," he said, "and you look just worn out yourself, Miss Constant."

"I have been up all night; I expect that gives me a tired look."

Mr. Landhunter asked permission to see the sick ones. Grace took him in to see Harry first and then into Mrs. Noble's and Minnie's room. He spoke kind and comforting words to them all, bidding them put their trust in Him who can heal the sick. Mrs. Noble requested him to offer a prayer. Kneeling down he offered an earnest and fervent prayer for God's blessing on that stricken household, and pleaded that the sick might be restored to health and strength. Greatly comforted they all felt; for when poor humanity, in all its weakness and distress, throws itself into the arms of a merciful and compassionate God, he never fails to give an answer of peace to its heart.

Wearily Grace Constant passed through the labors

of the day, being able to find but little time for rest, greatly as she needed it. Night came at last, a long weary night, with but little sleep for her, for the sick ones were no better, and required much attention. Often her mind reverted to her determination to accept Peter Bigman; but, though the thought brought suffering, she never faltered. Her decision had been made, the mental sacrifice had been given. Her dear friends should have the best service she could offer them.

Morning dawned of the next eventful day. It appeared clear and cold and beautiful. The doctor came and found his patients no better. Rev. John Landhunter called and was kind and helpful. He spoke kind words to the sick, and offered a prayer, which comforted all hearts. Afterward he cut wood and brought a good supply into the house.

Toward noon Grace began to look for the return of Peter Bigman. Her heart beat quickly at the thought, for when he came, doubtless he would ask for her answer; and though she had it ready for him, yet the thought brought no cheerful feelings, only sadness. As to the telegram which he was expected to bring, strange to say, she did not seem to think much about it, probably because she did not think that it would change, in any way, her relations to him or the Noble family, and those relations were the all absorbing subject which occupied her mind at present, together with the anxiety con-

nected with the sickness of every member of the household.

Noon came and Peter Bigman had not returned. Hour after hour passed slowly by, and still he came not. Grace wondered at the delay, and Harry became impatient. Still he did not come, and it was almost night.

When Peter Bigman started upon his unexpected errand for Grace Constant to Plankinton, it was with a cheerful heart. He felt that her sending him on this important mission, by special request, was an evidence of his growing in favor in her mind, and a happy augury of the successful issue of his suit. Then he remembered how, when he spoke of tomorrow being an eventful day for him, she dropped her eyes and blushed. He felt it was indeed an eventful day, and likely to be a happy day for him. He took but very little interest in the sickness of the Noble family except it concerned his own interests, but felt that it rather tended to forward those interests, and in that way was a benefit to him. When he became Grace Constant's lord and master the Noble family would, to a great extent, be obliged to take care of themselves. He would not have his wife slave and work herself to death for them; thus he drove along thinking of the realization of his hopes, and what he would do when they were accomplished, until he reached Land View. He stopped there a short time to inquire how the people

had passed through the blizzard. Every one whom he saw had many personal incidents to relate of what they had passed through, and spoke of the terrible high wind, the drifting snow, an impenetrable veil, and the intense cold; but all had passed through it safely, and were bright and healthy, as the red glow on their cheeks testified.

He resumed his way to Plankinton. As he passed scattered claim shanties and sod houses, an occasional occupant would come out to talk about the blizzard, and tell the universal story of cold, wind, and drifting snow; how they had been confined in their little houses all the time, and, if they had not prudently laid in a stock of fuel, how they would probably have frozen to death.

At length he reached Plankinton, and, putting up his horses at the hotel, he went at once to the telegraph office, and handed the operator the telegram.

"I'm afraid there'll be trouble getting this through, for the blizzard has played the mischief with the wires," said the operator.

"I hope there'll not be much delay about it, for I live a long way from here and want to drive back with the answer to-night;" his usual frown settling on his brow.

"I will do the best I can for you, sir; but I may as well tell you frankly that you will not be able to receive an answer to-night."

Peter Bigman left the office in a sulky mood. He

knew when he started that he would not be able to return until to-morrow ; still he had hoped it might be different, and the disappointment made him frown and sulk. He returned to the hotel and obtained a late dinner. After dinner he sat in the small and uncomfortable office of the hotel, and listened to the incidents about the blizzard which country people and others related. A driver of a small wagon told how he got caught in the blizzard on the prairie, far away from any house. It came up so suddenly that it was a surprise to him, and it became so cold that he was afraid he would freeze to death. To save himself he unhitched the horses, and let them run to find shelter as best they could. He then overturned his wagon, and placing it between him and the wind, wrapped himself up in the buffalo robes he was provided with, laid down behind it, and waited for the blizzard to blow itself out. "I had a dreadful cold time of it, though," he said, "and a long walk after it was over."

Another related how a doctor had been frozen to death farther north. The doctor was accustomed to being out in storms, and prepared himself for them by carrying plenty of wraps with him. When he got caught in this one he was near an empty house, which had a stable near it. He drove to the house, unhitched his horses, put them in the stable ; went to the sleigh and carried some of his wraps to the house ; then returned to the sleigh for the re-

mainder of his things. The blizzard must have been at its worst at this time, and the air so full of snow that objects were not discernible; for the doctor, in returning to the house, missed the direction, wandered off into the storm, got lost, and when found was frozen to death. Some one remarked that the doctor had been out in so many storms, that he must have been a little careless in taking his direction when he started back to the house the second time. Instances were related of men losing their lives in going from their houses to their barns, to feed and water their cattle, they having missed the barns, and wandered off into the storm. "The only safe way," one remarked, "was to run a rope from the house to the barn to guide a person going from one to the other." Another remarked that it was a good thing to keep a good supply of wood or some kind of fuel in the house or near the door, for with the mercury down forty below zero, it was a bad thing to have no fire."

Peter Bigman listened to this office talk for several hours and then went to the telegraph office to inquire if any answer had been received to the message? The operator was ticking away at his instrument, and only looked up long enough to reply:

"Wires in bad shape. Haven't got your message off yet."

Peter Bigman scowled, but, scowl as he might, he found he would have to spend the night at Plankinton. He went back and made himself as comfortable

ble as he could in the uncomfortable hotel. As soon as the telegraph office was open in the morning Peter Bigman entered and inquired, in an injured tone:

"Any answer for me yet?"

"Got your message off last night, expect there'll be an answer some time to-day," the operator answered, rather sharply, for Peter Bigman's manner provoked him.

About eleven o'clock he called in again and inquired.

"Yes, got an answer about half an hour ago," handing him a yellow envelope with the name of the company printed on top.

"Hold on! Wait a minute!" the operator called after him, as Peter Bigman was closing the door. "There is another message coming over the wires for Grace Constant."

Peter Bigman went back into the office and waited until the operator copied the message.

"I'll mark the first one No. 1," he said, so that if Grace Constant wants to know which came first I can tell her." He took his lead pencil out of his pocket and so marked it; when the clerk handed him the other he marked it No. 2. He hurried from the telegraph office to the hotel, ordered his team hitched up, paid his bill, and in a short time was driving rapidly back to Nobleton. When he had gotten about half-way back a slight accident happened to one of his wagon wheels, and he was obliged to get out,

take off his overcoat, and repair it. He was also obliged to drive slowly the rest of the way, for fear of a complete breakdown.

These delays made him very impatient. He scowled at the horses, wagon, road, every thing. Was not this the day when Grace Constant had promised him her answer? and now it would be night before he could reach her home; if any further delays occurred he might not be able to get there that night. Did ever things work so crookedly? He became hot and impatient at the slow gait of the horses, but was afraid to make them go faster. Thus slowly and tediously he journeyed toward the goal of his hopes. It was eight o'clock in the evening when he arrived at Nobleton. He hastily tied his team and knocked at the door. It was opened, greatly to his surprise, by Mrs. Snow, and still greater was his surprise when he found that the only other occupant of the outer room was Rev. John Landhunter. The minister placed a chair by the stove for him. Mrs. Snow said: "You looked surprised to see me here, Mr. Bigman; I'm rather surprised myself. I'll tell you how it happened. Miss Foundit came to see me, late this afternoon, and I asked her if she wouldn't take care of my Snow birdies awhile, while I went over to Noble's to see how the sick folks were getting along. She said she would, so I bundled up and came over. Mr. Landhunter had just got here before I did. He'd been to Land View, and called in on his way back, to inquire for

the sick. Miss Constant was very glad to see me, but the poor thing looked just clean tired out, and I hadn't been in the house more than half an hour before she fainted away. When she came to I undressed her and put her to bed beside Minnie. She's there yet, poor dear. I asked Mr. Landhunter to go and ask Miss Foundit if she wouldn't take care of my children to-night, and she consented; so I'm going to be nurse to-night.

"I have made up my mind to stay, also," said Mr. Landhunter. "Harry asked me to stay and sleep with him, and as this stricken household needs a well man in it, I think I had better stay."

Peter Bigman had expected Grace Constant to receive him graciously, and, after delivering his telegrams, to accept him. He found her sick in bed, and the household virtually conducted by neighbors. He was surprised and annoyed beyond measure. His face plainly showed his feelings, for he looked dark and scowling. For a few minutes he forgot the errand from which he had just returned, forgot the telegrams, forgot every thing, but his own disappointment.

Mr. Landhunter, at a loss to account for his dark looks and silence, said, directly:

"Miss Constant told me of your errand to Plankinton, and she requested Mrs. Snow, after she had put her to bed, that when you returned with the telegram, to please to take it to her at once, and to request you to call to-morrow."

She had not forgotten him, then. Her message soothed his feelings, and his countenance began to clear up.

"I have two messages for Grace Constant, instead of one, as she expected. I will give them to you to take to her to read at once, Mrs. Snow. Tell her I numbered them, so she would know which came first, if it makes any difference." He unbuttoned his overcoat and put his hand into the pocket where he had placed the telegrams. "Here is No. 1," said he, handing it to her, "and No. 2 must be in the same place."

But No. 2 did not make its appearance. He emptied his pocket of all its contents, and searched carefully, but he could not find it.

"Very strange!" he said, looking perplexed and mortified. "I certainly put it there with the other, at least I think so."

Then he searched all his other pockets, but it was not to be found. Then he took a light, and he and Mr. Landhunter went out and searched the wagon; but they could not find the telegram. They returned to the house.

Peter Bigman gave up the search at last. No words could express his anger and disappointment, his second disappointment since he had returned. His face was unpleasant to look upon, so distorted was it by violent emotions. At last, in the effort to make some explanation for the loss of the telegram, he said :

"I must have lost it when I got out to fix my wagon. It must have slipped out of my pocket and been lost on the prairie."

"I think Mrs. Snow had better take this telegram in for Miss Constant to read," said Mr. Landhunter. "She had better tell her, also, there was another one, which, unfortunately, you have lost. I think it always best to tell the plain truth about these perplexities. My experience is that it always turns out best in the end," he added.

"I thought it might be better to say nothing to her about No. 2 until I can get a copy; but if you do tell her about No. 2, Mrs. Snow, tell her I will start back to Plankinton to-morrow morning and get a copy," said Peter Bigman.

Mrs. Snow took the telegram and went into Mrs. Noble's room. Minnie was asleep, but Grace Constant and Mrs. Noble were awake. Mrs. Snow brought the kerosene lamp near the bed so that Grace could read the telegram, which she handed her.

"Why is this marked No. 1?" Grace inquired, noticing the number on the envelope.

"O, there's another marked No. 2, but Mr. Bigman lost it! He seems to feel so bad about it, poor fellow, and he told me to tell you that he would start right back to Plankinton to-morrow morning and get a copy," Mrs. Snow replied.

"How did he lose it?"

"Something broke about his wagon, and he had to get out and fix it. He thinks he lost it there."

"I hope it will not be of sufficient importance to require him to return at once to Plankinton. Perhaps I can tell better after reading this telegram." She tore open the yellow envelope, and read as follows:

"NEW YORK, *Dec.* 18, 1883.

"MISS GRACE CONSTANT: Yours of the 17th received. We have had charge of legal matters since your father's decease; but other important matters are in charge of Messrs. Banks & White, 99 Broad Street. In accordance with your father's wishes, we have sent them your address. They will immediately advise you by telegraph.

"QUIBBLE & TWIST."

Grace read the telegram two or three times, and then told Mrs. Snow to take it to Mrs. Noble to read, remarking: "This telegram throws but little light upon the subject. Doubtless the other explains it fully."

"How unfortunate that Mr. Bigman should have lost the other," said Mrs. Noble, after she had read the telegram. "I think you will be obliged to let him return for a copy to-morrow, Grace dear. It seems hard, too, for he has had a very long journey already."

"Mrs. Snow, please ask Mr. Landhunter to take this telegram to Harry, and let him read it. Tell

him about No. 2 being lost, and ask his opinion about what had best be done."

Mr. Landhunter did as requested.

When Harry read the telegram he exclaimed: "Well, here we are as much in the dark as ever; there ought to be a telegram from Banks & White."

"There was another, but Mr. Bigman lost it," said Mr. Landhunter.

"He offers to go back to-morrow and get a copy."

"Let him go, by all means; a man who loses an important telegram like that ought to be put to some trouble."

Mrs. Noble and Grace Constant both agreed with Harry, and Peter Bigman's offer was accepted.

When Peter Bigman left Mrs. Noble's that night it was not as an accepted lover, but as a man much chagrined at his own carelessness.

Peter Bigman started early next morning for Plankinton. A night's rest had somewhat soothed his feelings. "After all," he thought, "losing the telegram was only a mishap, and does not make any important difference in my relations to Grace Constant. I am just as likely to get her now as before it happened. I think I am in a fair way of getting her, too, for those folks are in a pretty bad fix: in debt, and all sick. I think I will get her; in fact, it's almost a certainty. My acceptance is only delayed a day by the loss of the telegram." Thus he reasoned himself into quite a cheerful state of mind. Arrived

at Plankinton, he easily got a copy of telegram No. 2. After feeding his horse and getting a meal, he started back again, driving rapidly, and taking great care that he did not lose the telegram a second time.

When he arrived at Nobleton it was early candle-light. He knocked at the door with a heart more rapidly beating than it was wont. He was bidden to enter.

Grace Constant was sitting by the table, alone; she looked pale and tired.

"I am pleased to see you back again safely," she said, rising to receive him.

She placed a chair for him; invited him to remove his overcoat, and warm himself.

"Thank you," he said, well pleased, and doing as she requested.

"I am glad you are able to be about again," he said, after he was seated by the stove.

"Thank you. Through the kindness of Mrs. Snow and Mr. Landhunter I got a good sleep last night, and have felt better all day. They have returned to their homes."

"I am pleased to say that I have not been so unfortunate as to lose your telegram to-day, Miss Constant. Here it is," handing her the yellow envelope.

"Thank you. It was too bad that you were obliged to make two trips for me. You are very kind. Will

you please excuse me a moment while I read the telegram that has caused you so much trouble?"

"Certainly."

She seated herself by the table facing him, and, drawing the lamp toward her, tore open the envelope. The expression of her face was placid and sad. She read as follows:

"NEW YORK, Dec. 18, 1883.

"MISS GRACE CONSTANT: MESSRS. Quibble & Twist have just sent us your address. As requested by your father, we take great pleasure in informing you that we have had the honor of being the bankers of his estate, acting as trustees. Upon your twenty-first birthday you entered upon full control of the estate, which we stand ready to hand over to you. We think we feel a proper pride in reporting to you that the estate has grown from six hundred thousand dollars to one million dollars under our management. There is a cash credit of ten thousand dollars on our books, which you can draw upon, or, if desirable, telegraph us and we will remit. We will give you full particulars upon application. We also hold a letter which explains your father's motives for leaving his estate in this way to you, which letter he left in our safe-keeping for you. Awaiting further advisement,

"BANKS & WHITE."

A bright glow spread over Grace Constant's face as she read. Her dark-blue eyes grew bright and

sparkling; a relieved look of great joy replaced the pale, worn look as if by magic. She was transformed, lifted up from sadness to joy, from dread to hope. The change in her appearance was wonderful. Peter Bigman was watching her intently; he saw the wonderful change. The first jealous thought that passed through his mind was, "How will this affect my prospects?"

Grace Constant sat looking at the telegram, devouring every golden word over again, oblivious of his presence.

"Your telegram seems to bring you good news," he said, at length.

She looked at him as though she saw him afar off, beyond the boundaries of a joyous dream.

"O, yes," she exclaimed. "I must tell auntie, and Harry, and Minnie," and she went hastily into Mrs. Noble's room, closing the door after her, and leaving him alone.

"O, auntie," she said, kissing her, "I have such good news. Read my telegram." She brought the light and held it while Mrs. Noble read the telegram. As Mrs. Noble read it her pale face became suffused with joy.

"Dear Grace, I am so glad and thankful. If ever any one in this weary world deserved the good things of this life you do. I congratulate you. Let me kiss you, dear."

"O, auntie, I'm so glad! No more hardships

and poverty for us now; but I must tell Minnie and Harry."

Minnie was weak, but surprised and happy to hear the good news; she gave Grace a long kiss. Harry read the dispatch with amazed surprise.

"Well, Grace, this beats my time altogether; but I'm glad of your good fortune. For you are the best girl in the world, and deserve it."

"Don't flatter me, Harry; I'm glad, too. It will do us all so much good."

"Is Peter Bigman out in the room yet?" Harry inquired.

"O, yes; I quite forgot him!" Grace exclaimed; and a look of consternation overspread her face, as she remembered the answer she was to give him to night. How different her answer would be to what she had expected to give. But the physical sacrifice is not always required; the mental is sometimes acceptable alone. Abraham's knife never fell upon the beloved Isaac; so Grace Constant was only mentally required to sacrifice herself for her friends. She returned to Peter Bigman, closing all the doors, that they might not be overheard. He was still sitting by the stove, anxiously and nervously awaiting her return.

"Mr. Bigman," said Grace Constant to him, "it is but proper that you should read the message which has caused you so much trouble and which brings such good news to me." She handed him

the telegram, and then took her former seat by the table facing him, to watch his countenance while he read it.

A look of utter, unbounded surprise and amazement overspread Peter Bigman's face as he read, followed, as he thought of its probable effects upon his suit, by a scowl and dark looks. He held the paper, gazing at it in absent-minded consternation for several moments, after he had read it.

Grace sat looking at him, patiently waiting for him to speak.

"This is good news for you," he said in a hoarse voice, at length, but he did not look at her. He was thinking that all the hold he had upon her was gone; she had now far more money than he could give her. There was not the motive left for her to sacrifice herself for her friends. Then a stubborn mood came over him. He would not ask for her answer, he would wait. Grace waited for him to ask the momentous question, but it came not, and she noted the stubborn look on his face; she determined to hasten the crisis.

"Mr. Bigman," she said, firmly but kindly, "yesterday was the day upon which I promised to give a final answer to your proposal; you are aware I was prevented by sickness; I must tell you now, in all kindness, that I must decline your offer. I thank you greatly for your kindness to me and my friends, and hope always to remain your friend. If I can

assist you in any way I hope you will feel free to ask me."

Peter Bigman never looked at her; he sat staring at the stove for several minutes, then arose, threw the telegram upon the table, and seizing his overcoat rushed out into the night. He mounted his wagon, and lashed his horses into a gallop. O, the bitterness of the blow to his self-love, of this final rejection! And he had been at such pains to carry the telegram that blasted his hopes. O, the irony of fate!

Ah, no; the infidel may say that, but the Christian in such things sees the hand of God, who has declared, "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered," and "that all things work together for good to them that love God." The wicked fall when they least expect it; the good rise from the dust in God's good time.

The gall of his disappointment grew more bitter as Peter Bigman, that night, thought over the great changes Grace Constant's unexpected fortune had wrought. The man who had been his subordinate in the New York office would now, doubtless, be placed far above him in position, for he knew that Grace Constant was generous, and would insist upon the Noble family sharing her good fortune. This was a terrible blow to his self-love, second only to the loss of Grace Constant herself. But a few days before he had been gloating over the misfortunes of the Noble

family and his own exemption from reverses; but the sudden change had made his own affairs seem but little trifles compared with the overtowering success of the Nobles, and his small possessions assumed a very insignificant aspect in his eyes compared with Grace Constant's million. But the bitterest of all was the hopeless ending of his tireless pursuit of Grace Constant.

CHAPTER XIX.

Return to New York—Handsome gifts—Nathan Constant's last letter to his daughter—Harry's scruples overcome.

THERE had not been such happy hearts for many nights at Nobleton as on that of the nineteenth of December. Grace Constant's heart sang a great and continual pæan of joy. Mrs. Noble's and Minnie's hearts were lighter, too; a burden had been rolled from their minds, and, notwithstanding their weakness and illness, they felt much relieved. Harry's heart was wild with joy, at first, at the improved prospects of the family; then certain other feelings began to assert themselves with regard to Grace's changed relations to the family, as a very rich woman, and particularly his own personal relations to her. He felt in some way as if Grace's money had raised a barrier between them which had not existed before. He loved her as much as ever, but felt that if he had declared his love before she had inherited this great fortune, he could in no wise have been thought mercenary. Should he declare it now he might be open to the charge of being a fortune-hunter; hence Harry's rejoicings were not altogether without alloy.

Grace Constant's gladness soon began to assume a practical shape. Early the next morning Rev. John

Landhunter called, and was at once told of Grace Constant's fortune. In the family prayer which he offered were many expressions of thanksgiving, as well as petitions, to which every heart responded a hearty "Amen."

After prayer Grace Constant called Mr. Landhunter into Harry's room, and said: "I wish to hold a little consultation as to what is best to be done; I wish to begin to use my money efficiently and to a good purpose at once, and want you both to advise and help me."

"It will afford me pleasure to help you in any way I can," said Rev. John Landhunter.

"Grace, I'm sorry I can't stir around and help you, instead of being an additional burden, but my ankle feels a little better to-day, and I hope I shall soon be able to get around a little."

"Do not fret, Harry; I'm sorry you have suffered so much pain, and now that I have plenty of money, and am able to command the services of others, I hope I shall be able to arrange matters so that you need make no exertions which would be likely to permanently injure your foot."

"Please consider my time at your disposal, Miss Constant, until you can arrange matters more to your satisfaction," said Mr. Landhunter.

"You are very kind, Mr. Landhunter, and I think I shall be obliged to accept your generous offer" Grace replied.

"Harry," she said, "you understand business customs; how am I to get money from New York here rapidly?"

"You can telegraph to Banks & White to send it to you through the banks, or you can have some sent by telegraph; that is the quickest way."

"Now, Mr. Landhunter, I am going to put you to service. I would like you to drive over to Mrs. Snow's and Miss Foundit's and see if you can arrange with them for Mrs. Snow to come here and act as nurse to-morrow, while Miss Foundit takes care of the children. You may tell them the news of my good fortune; I am sure they will both be pleased to hear of it."

"I will go at once," said Mr. Landhunter.

"Wait a moment; I wish to tell you what I want you to do to-morrow. I want you to drive me to Plankinton, starting very early, so we can return the same day. I am going to send to New York for some money, and to spend some of it, too," she said, smiling.

"I will guarantee to be here quite as early as you wish," he replied, pleasantly. He then left the house to go to Mrs. Snow's. After he had gone Grace and Harry continued in consultation for some time, making arrangements as to what was best to be done under the circumstances.

Rev. John Landhunter was quite successful in making his arrangements, and the next morning, very

early, he drove up to the door and assisted Mrs. Snow from his wagon. Mrs. Snow threw herself into Grace's arms, weeping profusely. "I'm so glad you've come into a fortune; I don't know any one who deserves one more," she said, in broken, joyful words.

As soon as possible Grace Constant and Rev. John Landhunter started on their journey. It was a clear, cold, crisp, exhilarating day.

Arrived at Plankinton they drove to the telegraph office, and Grace Constant sent the following telegram:

"PLANKINTON, Dec. 21, 1883.

"MESSRS. BANKS & WHITE, 99 Broad St., N. Y.:
Your telegram of the 18th received. Please remit me, in the quickest manner possible, five thousand dollars.
GRACE CONSTANT."

They then went to the hotel and got their dinner; after dinner they made inquiries where the best medical talent could be obtained in that part of the country. Having obtained the addresses of two good doctors, one at Mitchell, and the other at Sioux Falls, they went to the telegraph office and telegraphed them to come to Plankinton the next day to visit patients in the country. In a short time there were answers from both doctors, that they would be there on the morning train. Grace requested Mr. Landhunter to go to a livery stable and make arrangements to have a team meet the doctors and drive them to

Nobleton. While he was gone she remained in the telegraph office waiting for a telegram from New York. She did not have to wait long until the answer came, as follows:

"NEW YORK, Dec., 21, 1883.

"MISS GRACE CONSTANT: Telegram received. We have arranged, by telegraph, to have five thousand dollars placed to your credit in the Plankinton bank to-day. You have but to identify yourself to draw the money.

BANKS & WHITE."

They went to the Plankinton bank, and found the money had been already placed to Grace Constant's credit. Assisted by Mr. Landhunter, who was acquainted in Plankinton, she had no difficulty in identifying herself and drawing what money she wanted. After that Grace Constant hunted for a nurse, and succeeded in finding one well recommended. She made arrangements for her to go to Nobleton the next day with the doctors. She also visited the stores and bought what nourishing food and delicacies she thought would be acceptable to the sick folks. While she was doing these things she had requested Mr. Landhunter to hunt up a pair of good horses, and a double-seated covered carriage, and have them driven around to the hotel for her inspection. When she arrived the team was there. She was pleased with it and bought it, making arrangements to have the horses and carriage driven to Nobleton the next day.

Having completed their work in Plankinton, they started back to Nobleton. Passing through Land View, they tarried a few minutes to hire a carpenter to come down with a load of lumber the next day and enlarge the stable. They arrived at Nobleton early in the evening.

Grace Constant related what they had accomplished, and was warmly thanked, particularly by Harry.

"Why, Grace, I had no idea you had so much business ability in you," he said.

"Yes. But you know I talked it all over with you before I started, - and I had Mr. Landhunter to help me," she replied, modestly.

"I know all that, but I am proud of your executive ability all the same."

Mrs. Snow had a good supper prepared for them, and after partaking of it Mr. Landhunter drove her home, saying that he would return to-morrow.

"To-morrow is likely to be a busy day for us," said Harry, after they had gone.

Harry was right; to-morrow was a busy day. While Grace was preparing breakfast she heard a shuffling noise, and looking around saw Harry hobbling toward the stove with a cane.

"Why, Harry!" she exclaimed; "is your foot well enough to use?"

"I hope so; at any rate, I'm not going to stay in bed with all those people here."

The first arrival was the carpenter with a load of

lumber, and he commenced at once to enlarge the stable. About noon the carriage was driven up to the door containing the two doctors and the nurse. Rev. Mr. Landhunter arrived about the same time. Grace Constant had provided a dinner for them, which they enjoyed heartily, for they were hungry after their long ride through the bracing morning air. The nurse was efficient and tidy, and at once began her labors in a manner which satisfied Grace that she would be a competent help.

The doctors made a careful examination of Mrs. Noble and Minnie, and, after a long consultation, told Grace and Harry that the patients were both afflicted with a low nervous fever—were much prostrated; but the crisis, in each case, had evidently been passed quite recently. They recommended careful nursing and nourishing diet, and also that they be removed as soon as possible to some place where they could obtain more of the comforts of life.

In answer to a question from Harry as to how long the doctors thought it would be before they would be able to move them, they answered, "Probably in a week or ten days."

The doctors then examined Harry's ankle, and changed the treatment. Soon the horses and carriage which Grace Constant had bought arrived. The driver returned in the carriage with the physicians.

"The doctors' visit was a very satisfactory one," said Harry, after they had gone.

"Very," said Grace. "My heart is full of joy and thankfulness at the prospect of the early recovery of our dear invalids, and I wish to say further, that just as soon as they are able to move I want to take them away; I want to surround them with every comfort and luxury. I am so glad that I am able to do so. Where shall we take them, Harry?"

"I'm sure I don't know unless it is to New York," said Harry, laughing rather incredulously.

"Just the place," said Grace, with animation. "I am going to ask auntie and Minnie if they would not like to go to New York. The very thoughts of it will make them get well faster."

She was right; the thought of returning to their old home and old friends quickened the pulses of their hearts, and the bright hopes before them hastened their recovery. In two days Harry was able to get into the new carriage and drive the new team, which he pronounced good. His ankle continued to improve. In three days Minnie and Mrs. Noble were able to sit up awhile in their room. In a week they were able to take an occasional meal with the family.

"Harry," said Grace Constant to him, one morning, "I think our invalids will be able to start for New York in a day or two. Had we not better fix the day, and send by the stage and order a Pullman sleeping-car?"

"A Pullman sleeper!—all to ourselves?"

"Yes, Mr. Harry; you forget I am a rich woman," she said, smiling. "I propose to have all the comforts possible, and privacy, too, for our sick folks."

"Well, Grace, I'll not complain, but I must confess that the idea was rather stunning at first. We are not used to such style out here on the prairies, you know."

Mrs. Noble and Minnie were consulted, the day was fixed, and the stage driver instructed to order a Pullman sleeper at the depot for a certain train.

Mrs. Noble expressed a wish to have the neighbors come to see her before she left. Harry drove the carriage to Mrs. Snow's, and got Fanny Foundit to look after the children while Mrs. Snow made her parting call. Then he took Miss Foundit over to say "Good-bye," which she did effusively. Harry stopped to tell Peter Bigman that they were going to New York for the balance of the winter, and would not be back probably until late in the spring. He invited him to come for a farewell call. But Peter Bigman was sulky, and scowled, offering no congratulations, did not promise to come, and did not come.

"What can be the matter with Peter Bigman?" said Harry, after he got home. "He was awfully good and pleasant for a long while; now he is as sour and glum as ever he was, even worse; and he don't come any more, either. I wonder if he is envious of our good luck?"

Grace looked down and said nothing. Mrs. Noble looked at her with an inquiring look.

It was not necessary to hunt up Rev. John Landhunter to tell him that they were going away, for he spent a good deal of his time there.

Many other neighbors also called to congratulate them and bid them farewell.

At length the day of departure arrived. Rev. John Landhunter volunteered to drive them to Plankinton. The team was to be left in his charge while they were gone. The invalids bore the journey to Plankinton well. They were to take the night train for Chicago.

Before they started Grace Constant had a private interview with Mr. Landhunter. She gave him five hundred dollars, and told him to give it to Mrs. Snow and tell her to use it to take her family away for the winter. She also gave him one hundred dollars to present to Fanny Foundit.

Rev. John Landhunter promised to faithfully execute his commissions, which he did, and Grace overheard Minnie promise to write to him.

They were "all aboard" the Pullman and started for New York. All this was such an improvement on their best hopes and anticipations, that it seemed little short of a miracle.

They arrived safely in Chicago, where they remained a day to give the invalids a rest. Then they started in the Pullman once more. They did not cease

their journeyings until they were comfortably settled in an elegant up-town hotel in New York city.

Ever since Grace Constant's accession to her fortune there seemed to her to be a change in Harry's feelings toward her. He was still familiar, brotherly, and kind; but there was an intangible something that seemed to hold her aloof from him. Sometimes, when she unexpectedly caught his eye, it puzzled her. She read the old love in it, which she had seen of yore, and to the consummation of which she now saw no obstacle; but there was something else as well which she could not fathom. Without being unmaidenly, she showed him, as far as she could, the state of her heart; but that indefinable something kept him back; he was always near her, yet his heart, which she could not but believe was hers, seemed to elude her.

"What could it be?" she often asked herself. "There is no difference in me except that I am rich, and surely Harry knows me too well to think that my fortune would affect my feelings toward him, except, perhaps, to make me happy to think that it will be the means of increasing our mutual happiness."

Grace Constant now surrounded Mrs. Noble and Minnie with every comfort and luxury that her wealth could furnish. Old acquaintances heard of their return to New York and to fortune, and came to see them; familiar scenes revived them, and in a

short time they were well on the road to health. Harry's ankle was soon well enough to enable him to walk pretty well with a cane, although he still limped a little.

Grace paid repeated visits to her bankers, and one of the results of those visits was that one morning Mrs. Noble, Minnie, and Harry each received a large, formidable-looking business envelope. They were breakfasting in their private parlor.

"What can this be?" said Harry, rapidly tearing open his envelope and reading aloud:

"NEW YORK, Jan. 5, 1884.

"MR. HENRY NOBLE:

"DEAR SIR: At the request of Grace Constant we have placed one hundred thousand dollars in the First National Bank of New York to your credit. Miss Grace Constant presents this sum to you as a free gift. We herein inclose certificates of deposit for same.

"Very respectfully, BANKS & WHITE."

Mrs. Noble's and Minnie's letters each contained gifts of the same kind and amount.

"My dear Grace," said Mrs. Noble, her eyes brimming with tears, "you are very kind, too kind; but we cannot accept these gifts."

"No, indeed," exclaimed Minnie.

"Grace, you must take them back," said Harry, with energy; "you have no right to give us such

sums as these; I'll have to get another guardian appointed for you."

Grace held her head down, blushing and smiling, until they were done speaking; then she looked up and around at them all. "Dear auntie, Minnie, and Harry," she said, "whatever you have had, be it much or little, you have freely shared it with me since I was a child. You have done more; you have taken the poor orphan into your hearts and given her love. Shall she not, out of her abundance, share with you? I have given you these gifts with a willing and loving heart, full of gratitude, and I ask you to receive them as freely as they are given, for I will not take them, or any part of them, back again."

Mrs. Noble's face was buried in her handkerchief. The tears were rolling down Minnie's cheeks. Harry turned his head away. "Dear Grace," said Mrs. Noble, when she had controlled her feelings, "after your kind words there is no more to be said but thank you. Come and kiss me, dear." Minnie just smothered Grace with kisses. "Dear Grace," she said, "how good you are; how I love you!"

"Well, Grace, I suppose I must thank you, too," said Harry, in a voice hoarse with emotion.

One of the first things which Grace Constant had done when she had come to New York was to ask Messrs. Banks & White for her father's letter. She hastened with it to her room with a heart full of love and thankfulness for her father, who had so abun-

dantly provided for her wants, and with some curiosity, as well, as to why his arrangements with regard to his fortune had been so secret. She opened the letter, which a loving hand had written so many years ago, with loving eagerness, and read as follows:

"NEW YORK, Oct. 20, 1871.

"TO GRACE CONSTANT:

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER: When you read this letter the spirit of your father will have been for many years the inhabitant of another world. I have made the best provision possible for you, my orphan daughter, in providing good and kind people for your guardians, James Noble and his amiable wife, my old friends. I have also supplied you with a small annuity, keeping the secret of my large fortune from all but James Noble. It is to be a secret sacredly kept from you until your maturity. Perhaps you will wonder at my pursuing this course, and question its wisdom. But I think my course a wise one. My past experience and observation have taught me that heiresses are generally sought in marriage for their fortunes, not for their good qualities, and not for love; often by well-appearing, but worthless, men; while good and worthy young men often hold aloof from them, lest they should be credited with mercenary motives. Some feel, too, that there is an incongruity in the wife being the richer, and, to a certain extent, that it would destroy their independ-

ence. So the chances are that a known heiress will marry an unworthy husband. My object in leaving my fortune as I have done has been to shield you. I think that the good qualities which I have observed in you as a child, after the training of Mrs. Noble, will cause you to be sought after by worthy men, under the impression that you have but little other dower. But when you arrive at twenty-one, your own observation and experience, as well as the last-written words of your father, will enable you to make a worthy choice. My dear Grace, may you be blessed with a worthy husband! And now giving you a father's last blessing, I close my last letter, expecting to meet you above.

“Your loving father, NATHAN CONSTANT.”

“How good, how kind, how thoughtful, my dear father was for the welfare of his little orphan daughter.” She kissed the letter over and over again, through her blinding tears.

Grace Constant thought and pondered much over the contents of her father's letter. Her fortune had become known. Already she had many admirers. Some she thought were attracted by her fortune. The invisible, impalpable barrier between her and Harry still remained; she began to investigate it in the light of her father's letter. Was it possible that the fear of being accused of mercenary motives held him back; or was he afraid her having superior riches

would trammel his independence? She concluded it must be one or the other, or perhaps both. She had strength of mind to determine that their mutual happiness should not be wrecked by any such false reasoning. After her gift of one hundred thousand dollars, Harry felt that Grace Constant had, to some extent, removed the barrier between them; but he still felt that his riches had come from her, and although he knew she made those gifts without regard to her feelings for him, he thought he might still be accused of mercenary motives; besides, he did not altogether relish having his wife so much richer than himself. He loved her more than ever since she had shown the rich qualities of her generous nature to all his family; he longed to possess her, but still he held back, although more than once he was upon the very verge of declaring his love.

One afternoon Mrs. Noble and Minnie had gone shopping, and Grace and Harry were sitting on a sofa alone in the parlor. They were talking over their Dakota experiences very familiarly.

"Harry," said Grace, rather abruptly, "somehow you seem different to me from what you used to be, what is the cause?"

"Do you really think I am different to you in my ways from what I was. I—I—" stammering and blushing.

"Yes, I do. Now tell me truly—I do not see so much difference in your actions toward me, for you

are kindness itself ; but there is something I cannot fathom, I can only feel it. Tell me, Harry, is it my fortune that makes the difference?" she spoke warmly and earnestly.

"Grace, I—I—" his confusion increased.

"Harry, if my fortune is to be a barrier between me and my best friends, I wish it were cast into the sea!" She arose and stood before him; she had spoken with great energy; the rich scarlet color rushed over her creamy white skin, and her dark-blue eyes flashed; she looked very beautiful as she stood looking down upon him. Harry looked up at her, his eyes full of admiration and love. Every barrier was broken down. He grasped her hand, and in a deep, earnest, broken voice said :

"Forgive me, Grace. I love you with all my heart. I confess I am unworthy of such generous love as yours."

"Harry, you know I love you," she said, her head drooping.

He drew her down to him and imprinted a long kiss on those sweet lips. Where two are anxious to be agreed, obstacles are easily removed. They readily arranged their affairs, to their mutual satisfaction, and, let the meddling world say what it will, they were content in each other's love. Grace felt that her father would have smiled upon her choice. When Harry presented her new daughter to his mother, she warmly embraced her and exclaimed :

"The fondest hope of my heart has been gratified."

Minnie loaded Grace with kisses.

In a short time there was a pleasant little wedding party in the parlor. Grace and Harry did not care for the *eclat* and display of a fashionable, public wedding. Then a pleasant little bridal trip to Washington for a few days. Then back again to New York.

"What a tall, handsome, noble-looking man he is! What a dignified and beautiful bride! What a splendid-looking couple!" were the popular remarks whenever Mr. and Mrs. Harry Noble appeared.

CHAPTER XX.

Harry relates his Dakota experiences to the clerks and gives them advice about going West—Improvements planned for Nobleton—Peter Bigman's marriage—A double wedding—Return to Nobleton.

WHEN Harry Noble had first returned from Dakota he had called at the railroad office, which he had left, to see his old associates. They were all glad to see him and heartily welcomed him back, although they expressed surprise to see him back so soon. But he readily explained his speedy return to their satisfaction. Many were the questions which they asked him about Dakota, and about the method of obtaining government land; more questions, indeed, than he could answer in business hours; so he invited a number of them to call on him at the hotel on a particular evening, promising at that time to give them all the information which they desired.

They all called, and were shown into Noble's private parlor. Harry told them of his own experiences in Dakota, adding:

"We got along nicely at first, but afterward we had a streak of bad luck, lost our money, were obliged to go into debt, were burned out, had a great deal of sickness in the family, and, to crown it all, I fell and badly sprained my ankle. I can tell you, fellows, I

felt pretty blue, and about concluded that we had made a mistake in going to Dakota. But looking over it since, I am satisfied we would have come out all right, even if we had had nothing to depend upon but the country. Mother and Minnie were over the worst of their fevers, and my sprain was getting better when our fortunes changed. I think we would have pulled through until spring, although we would have had a pretty tough time of it. In the spring I could have sold one of our quarter sections; even if I had sold two, we would have had six hundred and forty acres left, in preemption and tree claims—that is, a piece of land a mile square—and have had money enough left to pay our debts and make a new start; so I think we would have come out all right in the end. New settlers must expect some rough time, you know.”

One of them inquired if he would advise clerks and poor men in general to take up government land.

“I am a little careful in giving advice on that subject. I should be sorry to get any poor fellow into trouble. There are circumstances under which I would *not advise* a man to ‘Go West;’ for instance, if a married man is working on a small, or even a large, salary, which is about enough to keep his family, and has accumulated no savings, I would not advise him to go; nor a man, married or single, who is able to live respectably upon his salary and accumulate a fair percentage of savings. The latter class

can, if they know any thing about farming, or if they prefer it, save enough money to purchase an improved farm, upon which they can live comfortably without passing through the hardships of frontier life. The clerks and others whom I would advise to go West are those who are generally unmarried men, drawing small pay or small salaries in an unhealthy business, with but little prospect of increased pay or advancement. To such the government offers grand opportunities. If they have saved a little money they will find their progress easier at first; if not, and they have energy, health, manly ambition, and are willing to put their hands to whatever offers, each one may become a landlord, and an independent man. How much better than to drudge through life on poor pay, or in an office at a small salary, sometimes expected to "cook" accounts to serve the purposes of dishonest officials, who wish to deceive their directors and stockholders! I could wish that clerks, as a class, had more moral courage in this respect. They should refuse such demands even at the loss of their situations, but, I am sorry to say, I have never heard or read of one who has done so; when I do I shall regard him as a moral hero, and I am sure He who weighs all actions will not forget him. If there is not a place in an office for him, there are millions of acres of untaken government land in the great free West, of which he may take his share and be a free man among free men."

"Are men generally successful in taking up government land?" one of the clerks inquired.

"Yes, if they go where the country is unsettled, and comply with the law, there is no difficulty about it. It is very important, however, to select a good location; there is a great range in the prospective value of land."

The clerks thanked Harry for his kindness in giving them so much information, and, after partaking of elegant refreshments, departed.

Harry and Grace spent much of their leisure time in planning the improvements to be made at Nobleton; for the family had all agreed that Dakota would be their summer home. They had the drawings made for a beautiful summer cottage, roomy, with verandas, and to be prettily furnished. This plan was sent to an architect, in Mitchell, with orders to have operations commenced upon it, as early as possible, in the spring.

Harry, also, made arrangements to have a pier built in the lake, and a boat-house. He made up his mind to have row-boats of various kinds, and a pretty little yacht to skim over the lake, like a bird, with its white sail. He also purchased a number of fine cattle and horses, to be shipped in the spring, and made arrangements, through an agent, to have fine groves of trees planted on the tree claims.

"We will make Nobleton a beautiful place in a few years," he said to his wife. She smiled her acquiescence.

Minnie had kept up an active correspondence with Rev. John Landhunter, who kept them informed with Douglas County news. He told them of a clear, cold winter, with but few storms, little snow, and no more blizzards." "A much pleasanter winter," he said, "than a winter where it is alternately freezing and thawing." In the beginning of March he sent them a rather surprising piece of news: "Peter Bigman had married Fanny Foundit." He had performed the ceremony. Mrs. Bigman had told him that Peter Bigman seemed so lonesome, and seemed to need some one to look after his house so much, that she took pity on him and married him.

"I've been wondering why Fanny Foundit stayed so long on her land this cold winter, after she had proved up; now I see the reason plainly, as she says, she *married him*, and I've no doubt she'll take care of him as well," said Harry, laughing.

"She is a woman of indomitable will and energy," said Mrs. Noble.

"And something of a shrew, as well. If I am not mistaken, she'll lead Peter Bigman *a life*," said Harry.

Grace remembered that Peter Bigman had done them a number of favors, and thought that, although he did them in a selfish spirit, they ought to be rewarded. so she persuaded Harry to purchase some fine cattle and ship them to him.

Peter Bigman said, at first, "I will not take any thing from the Noble family;" but his wife said

that was all nonsense, so they kept them. The cattle were so handsome that he grew quite proud of them, and bragged to the settlers about "the fine cattle *I* have."

Minnie's correspondence with Rev. John Landhunter culminated in an offer of marriage, which, after gaining her mother's consent, she accepted. They planned to build a pretty parsonage at Land View and live there.

Mrs. Noble had been receiving occasional letters from Judge Lamberton, to which she replied. Early in March she received a dignified offer of marriage, in which he offered to build a pleasant home on his claim, so that she might be near her children, and, if she wished, spend her time with them when he was away on his official duties. After careful thought she determined to accept his offer, and have a "home of her own." When she informed her children they all expressed great regret at her decision, but were all pleased at her choice, and made up their minds to adapt themselves to these changes in the pleasantest manner possible.

Judge Lamberton and Rev. John Landhunter visited New York in April, and there was a double marriage in the hotel parlor. In May a happy family party started in a private Pullman car for Dakota.

Arrived at Land View, they found it had grown considerably, the church had been built, and a new hotel. Richard Moneycounter had made arrange-

ments with his creditors, and started his bank again, and there was another bank also. There was an air of thrift and growth about the place. Arrived at Nobleton, they found the house completed. It was built on the beautiful site on the lake. The furniture arrived. Grace had brought a couple of servants with her, and in a few days they had every thing nicely arranged.

Judge Lamberton's house was not finished, so he and his wife remained with Harry and Grace until it was completed, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Landhunter, until their parsonage was finished. Mrs. Snow and her family had returned, and Grace had taken them under her special protection; so Mrs. Snow will probably know poverty no more. The Nobles will doubtless prove good angels to many poor settlers.

Here we will leave the Noble family, of whom it may well be said, "that out of their troubles and trials they were happily 'delivered from afar.'"

THE END.

